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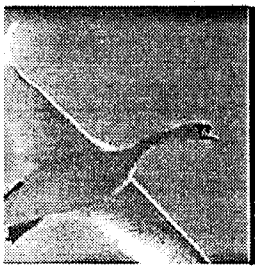

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- Voltaire

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Email: admin@tamiltimes.org
editor@tamiltimes.org
p.rajanayagam@btconnect.com
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No breakthrough

The recent visit by the Norwegian Foreign Minister Jan Peterson and other key Norwegian facilitators, including Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen and Special Envoy Erik Solheim, revived hopes of a resumption of peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which have remained in abeyance since April 2003 when the LTTE unilaterally withdrew. But there was no breakthrough and the Norwegians returned, if not empty handed, without much to pleased with for their strenuous endeavours.

The weeks before the Norwegian visit was overshadowed by a cotroversy that arose in respect of a statement attributed to the LTTE's chief negotiator, Mr Anton Balasingham, to the effect that the Tigers had not given up their struggle for a separate state in the exercise their right to external self-determination. This statement contained in a book authored by Mr Balasingham received widespread publicity raising the question whether the LTTE which had agreed to explore a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka at the third round of talks in Oslo in December 2002 had retreated from that commitment. That such a public controversy should have arisen just prior to the visit by the Norwegian Foreign Minister was unfortunate in that the exchanges of statements in this respect by both parties somewhat poisoned the atmosphere and diverted them away from focussing attention on the issue of resuming talks. So much so, Jan Peterson prefaced his visit by saying that the signals he was receiving were not positive and that their visit should not generate too many expectations.

Following the latest Norwegian visit and their discussions with both the Government and the LTTE, the position of the parties would appear to be as follows: both parties are committed to upholding the ceasefire; both parties are willing to resume talks, but disagree on the agenda for the resumption of talks; both parties are agreed that pending a final solution to the conflict, an interim authority to administer the Northeast should be created; LTTE insists that any resumed talks should be on the basis of its ISGA proposal without reference to any other document, but it is prepared to consider any amendments that the Government may propose during talks; the Government is prepared to recommence talks on the ISGA proposal, but as its provisions go beyond the federal structure to which the LTTE had already committed, the LTTE should first reiterate its commitment to a federal solution; and the Government also wants talks to commence on the final political solution shortly after the interim authority is set up, but the LTTE does not agree to this course.

It would appear that the LTTE leader also sent a message to the Government through the Norwegians to the effect that the LTTE could not depend on the Sri Lankan President alone to take forward the peace process in view of the fact that the government's coalition partner, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and others are opposing the peace process, and therefore the government and all its coalition partners should convey to the LTTE their unified stand, their consensus in support of the peace process.

Many have pointed out the critical need for a "southern consensus" as an essential prerequisite for reaching a political solution to the ethnic conflict. Up to now, because of their sectarian partisan rivalry, reaching such a consensus between the two major Sri Lankan political parties has remained an unfulfilled hope. Added to this problem is the position of the JVP which plays a significant role in the present governing coalition. Now that the LTTE has raised the requirement of a 'southern consensus' for the resumption of peace talks, the challenge of reaching such a consensus falls upon the leaders of these parties. The fate of the peace talks seem, therefore, to depend on the willingness and ability of these leaders to act in the national interest and reach a consensus.

Since the suspension of peace talks in April 2003, the Norwegians and the Japanese special envoy Yasushi Akashi must have made dozens of journey's between Oslo, Tokyo, London, Colombo and Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka travelling tens of thousands of miles. Not much has been achieved in terms of breaking the deadlock between the parties in return for the enormous amount of time, trouble and resources that must have been deployed in this endeavour. Everytime a visit of the peace envoys takes place, it is accompanied by a huge amount of publicity and the publicity itself generates hopes and expectations of a breakthrough and progress in the peace process. But the sad experience is that these hopes and expections have not materialised thereby undermining public confidence in the peace process itself. In this context, it may be well for the Norwegian facilitaors and the parties to consider whether it would be more purposeful and productive to undertake their tasks in shuttle-diplomacy more discretely away from the glare of media attention and television cameras.

PEACE PROCESS

No breakthrough towards talks

The much publicised Norway's latest bid to kick start Sri Lanka's faltering peace process ended without a breakthrough despite the efforts made by its facilating team comprising Foreign Minister Jan Petersen, his deputy Vidar Helgesen, Special Advisor Erik Solheim and Ambassador Hans Brattskar.

During the two-day visit which commenced on 11 November, the Foreign Minister and his team had many meetings and discussions with Government leaders, including President Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, the leadership of the LTTE including its leader V eluppillai Pirapaharan.

After a second round of talks between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Petersen, the president's office said in a statement the Norwegians had briefed her on their meeting with the Tiger leadership and their views on resuming talks.

"The president agreed the government will remain in close contact with the Norwegian facilitators on the question; she thanked the Norwegian foreign minister for the continued commitment of Norway in the facilitation of the Sri Lankan peace process," the statement said.

Both the Government and the LTTE in separate statements reiterated their commitment to maintaining the Oslo-brokered truce that has been in place since February 2002.

Ten days ealier, the Japanese Special Envoy Mr Yasushi Akashi had visited Sri Lanka and had discussions with all concerned parties including government and LTTE leaders with a view to getting the parties to the negotiating table.

At a meeting between Japanese Special Envoy Mr. Yasushi Akashi and the head of the LTTE's political division Mr. S. P Thamilchelvan on 1 November, Mr Akashi had emphasized the necessity for resuming dialogue in the interest of sustaining the momentum of peace built over the last two and a half years. Mr.Akashi told the LTTE's political head that his discussion with the Sri Lankan President made him feel that she was genuine in her commitment to the peace process and therefore he would encourage the LTTE too to enter negotiations without further delay.

Responding to Mr. Akashi's concern, Mr.Thamilchelvan said that the LTTE remains firmly committed to the peace process and it is exactly one year today that the proposal for an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) was submitted to the Sri Lankan government but that Colombo had not yet indicated its readiness to resume talks, although it expresses sincerity and commitment in mere words only.

"Parochial political concerns and lack of consensus in the south are delaying the peace process and humanitarian delivery to the war affected people of the northeast",, Tamilchelvan reportedly told Mr.Akashi. It was time, Mr.Thamilchelvan had reportedly said that the Sri Lankan Government seriously considered the unconditional support offered by the main opposition to take forward the peace process, sinking narrow political considerations.

Even before the arrival of the Norwegian envoys in Colombo, the controversy had broken out over the reported statement by Mr Balasingham that the LTTE was not bound by the "Oslo Declaration" of 5 December 2002 whereby the LTTE had agreed with the Government of Sri Lanka to explore a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka. In response to which the Government had asserted its position that the it was willing to resume talks on the basis of the LTTE's ISGA proposal provided the LTTE made a public commitment that stood by the "Oslo Declaration".

As the controversy raged the Norwegian FM prefaced their visit to Colombo with a warning that no one should expect anything dramatic to develop in the peace process and that the prospects of a breakthrough were dim. Petersen was quoted as saying,"Based on signals received from the parties over recent weeks, I do not have high expectations, but in difficult situations it is even more important to keep engaging with the parties".

It is understood that during their discussions, the Norwegian Foreign Minister had sought to persuade the LTTE leader to make statement to the effect that the LTTE was willing to abide by the Oslo Declaration and the Oslo Statement, and that it was willing to accept a Federal structure as a final solution. No such commitment was forthcoming and the LTTE leader is reported to have told the Foreign Minister, And Prabhakaran replied saying "ask the Sri Lanka government to make a statement that they have the consensus of the south and to ask whether the JVP supported the Government in discussing an interim self-rule authority for the north and east".

Reporting what Anton Balasingham told a news conference following the discussions between the LTTE leadership and the Norwegians, the LTTE's Peace Secretariat website said,

"Mr. Balasingham said that contrary to expectations and speculations, the facilitators did not bring any special message from the President that may be classified as a 'breakthrough'. Continuing further, responding to questions from the media Mr. Balasingham had this to say: "Though there was no special positive message, the facilitators did indicate that the President is of opinion that the discussions on ISGA, if that is to be the basis of the recommencement of talks, should necessarily be an integral part of the final resolution and therefore a process linked to the final political negotiations.

"We have made our position very clear in the same way as we have been consistently maintaining from the time of handing over the ISGA proposals about an year ago. It is wrong to link the ISGA with the final resolution because the former is directly and solely intended to address urgent humanitarian needs and the devastation caused by war and the latter is a political process that necessarily involves longer period of time and necessary ground work in the existing constitution for which the southern polity is not yet ready. This position of ours, we are told by the facilitators, would be conveyed to the President tonight and a feedback provided to us in course of time. It is only after receiving such a response, we would comment on the feasibility of early resumption of talks or otherwise.

"Discussing core issues, an exercise the Tamil people have been used to for

the last 50 years or so, interspaced with solemn pacts and agreements, all of which were abrogated unilaterally by successive governments, is, according to Tamil thinking, a futile endeavour. It is only because of this and in view of the urgency of institutionalising a humanitarian delivery mechanism appropriately embodied by us in the ISGA, we reiterate the necessity to bring on board such an effective mechanism prior to entering into a complex political negotiation.

"Much is being talked about an Oslo declaration. There is no such declaration. In fact after every round of peace negotiation, a statement was issued by the facilitators with the concurrence of the parties. In one such statement it was mentioned that the parties would explore finding a solution based on a federal principle. It is therefore not a declaration per se as is being interpreted widely. Mr. Prabaharan has, in almost all of his statements in the Martyrs Day every year said that the LTTE would negotiate for viable alternatives fulfilling the aspirations of the Tamil people, preserve their freedom, dignity and self-respect. This is based on the principle of internal self-determination and if that is denied to exercise the right of external self-determination."

"When it comes to the President's visit to India and her statements made therein to the effect that the LTTE is delaying the recommencement of talks, we strongly deny this position and would only say that it is the constraints that the President has in bringing together her constituent partners in government, especially the JVP that is opposed to the peace process and a negotiated settlement that causes the delay."

Following discussions the LTTE leadership had with the Norwegian delegation, Mr Balasingham said, "We have conveyed our stand to President Kumaratunga in a confidential document through the Norwegian Foreign Minister. Whether anything significant comes out or not will depend on the response given by the President to our communiqe."

Asked as to the contents of its communique, he said, "All I can say at this stage is that the Norwegians wanted the communication to be confidential until a response is given by the Presidential secretariat."

"The LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran last Friday in his meeting with the Norwegian Foreign Minister, specified that the ISGA proposal is not a blue print. We explained to the Norwegian delegation that the LTTE did not expect every word in the agreement to be implemented," Mr Balasingham said.

Asked as to whether the LTTE in anyway had changed its stand that the ISGA had to be institutionalised before the LTTE resumed peace talks with the government, he said, "No. Both the government and the international community are aware that the LTTE runs its own administration, with its own army, its own police and its own legal system. The difference is that this is not recognised by the government. The LTTE demand is that the government formalises its acceptance of the ISGA and approach the peace table to begin discussions based on the ISGA."

Mr Balasingham also confirmed that the LTTE's legal experts would be re-examining the ISGA proposal in the light of the objections raised by the government.

Mr Balasingham also said that peace talks would not be possible under the government of President Kumaratunga as long as the JVP stood in her way. "There is no consensus within the government towards a political settlement to the cause of the Tamils. There is no provision made by the government for the humanitarian needs of the north eastern Tamils. There is no consistency in the government's reaction to the ISGA."

Returning to Colombo, the Norwegian delegation met with President Kumaratunga, who was accompanied by Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, for a lengthy discussion followed by a midnight dinner. Nothing more a fresh was reported excpt to say that President Kumaratunga had promised her Government would "remain in close contact with the Norwegian facilitators on "the LTTE views on the steps to be adopted towards the resumption of direct negotiations with the Government of Sri Lanka."

Speaking to the press after having a meeting with Tamil Nationalist Alliance MPs on 16 November, Mr. S. P Thamilchelvan said, "The Sri Lankan government and all its coalition partners should convey to us their unified stand, their consensus in support of the peace process. The Sri Lankan government's coalition partner, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and others are opposing the peace process. Therefore we cannot depend on the Sri Lankan President alone to take forward the peace process. This is what our leader conveyed to the Sri Lankan President through the Norwegian Foreign Minister. Our leader explained our stand on the peace process very clearly to the Norwegians. We are prepared start talks on the basis of the ISGA unconditionally."

Ranil ready for talks with CBK

In an unusual positive development, Opposition UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe is reported to be ready to hold a series of talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga to take the peace process forward, party spokesman G.L. Peiris told a press briefing on 16 November. Addressing a news conference Prof. Peiris said a consensus among the major parties on the main issues was imperative to resume the peace process and Mr. Wickremesinghe was ready to offer his assistance to President Kumaratunga.

He said that while Mr. Wickremesinghe was ready to hold talks with the President she should work out a common stand with the JVP and other UPFA partners. He said the government should not use the peace process to achieve a political agenda and should not use extra constitutional means to change the constitution after removing the Speaker.

Previously, at the request of the President, opposition leader Mr. Wickremesinghe and President Kumaratunga met in Colombo for discussions on Tuesday, 2 November. At this meeting the President had urged, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe to participate in the all party National Advisory Council on the peace process to find a solution to end the island's ethnic conflict.

A press release by the Presidential Secretariat said that the President briefed him on the proceedings of the National Advisory Council for Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR) held on the previous day and on plans for future meetings of the Council.

The President emphasized the importance of the UNP's participation in the Council and requested Wickremesinghe to reconsider the party's decision for non-participation in the NACPR.

The opposition leader drew particular attention to the UNP statement on its position regarding the Oslo Declaration and communiqué and the Tokyo Declaration and emphasized the urgent need of early resumption of peace talks on the basis stated by the UNP. He reiterated that there was "a clear agreement between the government and the LTTE to explore a federal solution as the basis of a political resolution of the ethnic conflict".

The discussions were informative and constructive and covered number of matters relating to the peace process. The President and the opposition leader agreed that they would continue to meet from time to time.

NACPR meets

National Advisory Committee for Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR), a group formed by Sri Lanka's President as a mechanism to introduce inclusivity in the peace process, met on 1st November. Opposition United National Front (UNF) and TNA did not accept the invitation to join the NACPR.

The first meeting of this Political Committee of the National Advisory Committee for Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR) washeld on Monday 1st November, 2004. Two representatives from each political party represented in Parliament had been invited to attend these meetings. President Chandrika Kumaratunga made the opening address at this first meeting held at the BMICH, Colombo.

The Religious Committee of the NACPR met on 2nd November at the same venue. Religious dignitaries from Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Catholic and Christian communities participated in the deliberations. The first meeting of the Committee on Civil Society of the NACPR was held on 4th November; professionals from business, academic and non-governmental organizations were invited and attend the meeting.

These committees have been set up to deliberate on an ongoing basis on issues pertaining to the peace process, and advance understanding and reconciliation among different communities. At regular intervals these committees will submit their views and conclusions to the plenary sessions of the NACPR.

The committees will address several themes related to pursuing a just and durable peace in the country. These themes will include - the commitment to peaceful and non-violent means for resolving the violent conflict; the urgent need for effective development in the conflict-affected North and East; the importance of political reform that will lead to a permanent peace; and the strengthening of human rights and pluralism.

Representatives of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), Communist Party (CP), national Unity Alliance (NUA), Mahajana Exsath Peramuna (MEP), Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and dissidents of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) participated in the conference.

Mahanayakes call to UNP

Meanwhile, the Malwatte and the Asgiriya Chapter Mahanayaka Theras requested the opposition United National Party (UNP) to make their representations at the National Advisory Council for Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR) and forward proposals in order to see an end of the North-East conflict. The Mahanayakas are of the view that the UNP participation at the NACPR is immensely needed at this crucial moment when the Government is trying its best to bring a lasting solution to this most important issue.

The Malwatte Chapter Mahanayaka, the Most Ven. Tibbotuwawe Sri Sumangala Thera and the Asgiriya Chapter Mahanayaka, the Most Ven. Udugama Sri Buddharakkitha Thera said that it was the duty of the UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe to explain his party's views on this issue to the people in the country. The Mahanayakes made this request of the UNP when Kurunegala District UNP Parliamentarian Rohitha Bogollagama and UNP Chairman Malik Samarawickrema met the Buddhist prelates.

Battle lines are drawn

The relationship between President Kumaratunga Sri Lanka's largest Muslim party, the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC), her one time ally and coalition partner, has developed into open warfare. The SLMC has decided to fight President Chandrika Kumaratunga tooth and nail, after she lured three more SLMC MPs into her camp by making them ministers recently.

"The battle lines between us and the President have been drawn. We are going to carry the battle right to the Presidency. In the next elections, we will see that 500,000 Muslim votes do not go to her," said SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem. He said that Kumaratunga had a long record of trying to meddle with the SLMC, creating splits in it, buying off MPs and weakening the Muslim community. She was doing all this only for her political survival. Because of that she was losing the moral right to govern, he claimed. Because of her actions, he said that his party would not attend the next meeting of the National Reconciliation Council, which President Kumaratunga had formed to get a consensus on the peace process and talks with the LTTE.

After one of the SLMC MPs, Hussein Baila defected some months ago, three more SLMC MPs, out of the original ten, defected to take up non-cabinet ministerships in the government. With thesedefection, the SLMC's strength in parliament has come down to six. The newest defectors are MN Abdul Majeed, Abdul Rishard Badiyuddin and Ameer Ali Shihabdeen.

The defection of the three has given the Kumaratunga government 118 members in a parliament of 225 members. The government thus has a five member majority.

The government had started off in April this year with only 106 MPs. But since then it had got the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) with 8 MPs; and 4 MPs of the SLMC to join it by offering ministerships and other offices. Presently, the break up in the Sri Lankan parliament is as follows: The ruling group comprises the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) 105; Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) 1; Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC)-8; Defectors from the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC)4. Total:118.

The opposition comprises the United National Front (UNF)-69; SLMC-6; the Jathika Hela Uurumaya (JHU)-9; the Tamil National Alliance (TNA)- 22; Upcountry Peoples' Front (UPF)- 1. Total 107.

The Ashraff Congress applauded and welcomed the courageous and realistic decision taken by the three MPs of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress to join with the Government.

"This is a wise decision in the correct direction taken at the correct time; supportive of the aspirations of the majority of the people and of the objectives of the President and the government in uplifting the country from its present predicaments and taking the country towards Peace and Development", said the Leader of the Ashroff Congress, S. Subairdeen in connection with the three SLMC MPs joining hands with the Government and taking oaths as Ministers.

S. Subairdeen further stated that the three MPs namely, Rishard Badurdeen, Najeeb. A. Majeed and Ameer Ali have taken the rational and pragmatic decisions, whereas the leader of the SLMC has failed to realize the wisdom of taking such a decision, which would eventually benefit the country at large and the co mmunity they represent. ❑

News Review

● JVP aiming for power

As of now the Janatha Vimikthi Peramuna (JVP) may be the junior partner in the ruling coalition headed by the SLFP, but its leaders are determined to remain so for long. They entertain high hopes forming a government of their own in the not too distant future.

Speaking at a well attended meeting held on 13 November to commemorate the death of the JVP's founder leader, Rohana Wijeweera, and others who perished in the two insurrections the JVP launched – 1971 and 1981-1989 – the party leaders claimed that they were on the road to ultimate political triumph and would form a government of their own without having to play second fiddle to any other party. To drive home the point, the party's General Secretary Tilvin Silva asserted that the JVP had grown from strength to strength in just a few years - winning just a single seat in Parliament in 1994 to 39 seats by 2004. He called upon the party's rank and file to be ready to make sacrifices to make the JVP's victory 'over all reactionary forces' a reality.

The current leader of the JVP, Somawansa Amarasinghe who had been in self-imposed exile for a number of years from 1989 and returned to Sri Lanka in the run-up to the last general election, in a rare display of self-criticism, ventured to make critical comments about the late founder-leader who was uncritically glorified during his lifetime when he exercised unquestioning authority over the organization and all its activities. On this occasion, Mr Amarawansa conceded that Rohana Wijeweera had strengths, failings and weaknesses just like all other mortals. There were some doubts and questions as to how Rohana had conducted himself after he was arrested on November 12, 1989.

● President asked to name names

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has assured the Judicial Services Association that her recent speech was distorted and she did not intend to accuse the entire police and judiciary of corruption.

Earlier, the Executive Committee of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) yesterday decided to write to President Chandrika Kumaratunga, requesting her to make available whatever information she had on corrupt judges to the Judicial Services Commission (JSC) and other relevant authorities such as the Bribery Commission.

The BASL decision came in the wake of a recent comment made by President Kumaratunga while addressing the National Advisory Council on Prevention of Crime. She was reported to have said the Sri Lanka's judiciary and the police were a corrupt and there was no use of trying to hide the fact adding that that even Transparency International had said that the police and the judiciary were the most corrupt institutions in the country. She said the two institutions meant to maintain law and order were both corrupt. She further reportedly said that the Attorney General too had endorsed this view.

The BASL at its executive committee meeting held on 13 November also unanimously took the view that it could not totally agree with the President's remarks that the entire judiciary was corrupt. The committee had felt that any institution had its quota of black sheep, but that did not mean everyone was corrupt. A sweeping condemnation as that made by the President was unfair and undermined the confidence the people had in the whole judiciary. The BASL in a statement said it was "greatly perturbed" by the recent public statement made by the President that the judiciary of Sri Lanka was corrupt. The Bar Association said it did not agree with the statement and that the association had confidence in the judiciary as a whole.

At a two-hour meeting with judges on 16 November, the President said that in her recent speech to the National Advisory Committee of the Prevention of Crime, she had only quoted a report issued by Transparency International regarding corruption in the police and judiciary. The President said some were trying to misinterpret her speech and hence she would send recorded copies of her speech to the Chief Justice and Court of Appeal and senior High Court judges. The President said she appreciated the services rendered by judges despite the lack of facilities and other problems but she added there were some judges who made mistakes. She said salaries paid to judges were inadequate and action was being taken to rectify the situation.

● One island, but two countries!

President Kumaratunga's governing party or Ranil Wickremasinghe's UNP, despite their differences, or for that the 'international community' may be all of one view that a political solution to the ethnic conflict should be found within a 'united Sri Lanka'. However there is another key player involved in this conflict, the LTTE which certainly does appear not hold the same view. According to the Sunday Times (Colombo) correspondent, Frances Bulathsinghala, the LTTE's viewpoint is that there are already in existence 'two countries'. According to his report, a leading member of the LTTE had reportedly referred to the North-eastern province controlled by the Tigers as a 'separate country'.

Mr S Pulidevan, the general secretary of the LTTE's Peace Secretariat, who was a member of the LTTE team that toured Geneva and other European countries last month had reportedly told the correspondent that they had clearly told officials of those countries that there were two countries and not one. "If they did not know earlier now they know for certain that there are two different armies, two different legal structures, two different police units and two entirely different governments," Mr. Pulidevan had said adding that the LTTE had also impressed upon officials in European and Scandinavian countries they visited that it was only the LTTE which was concerned about the welfare of the Tamil people.

"We want the international community to be aware that we have our own country. This was the purpose of our visit. We also wanted to inform them that rehabilitation work in the region of Tamil Eelam is only carried out by us. These officials now know that there two different countries with two different governments," Mr. Pilidevan had said.

It is also reported that the LTTE delegation during its recent European visit has stipulated that funds allocated by NGOs for projects in the Northeast should be sent to the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), an NGO said to be run by LTTE members. It is the TRO that distributes money for the projects that it promotes. This strategy would presumably give the LTTE control of funds provided by foreign countries and institutions.

● Chopper rides

Despite the peace process remaining deadlocked amidst accusations and counter-accusations as to which party is to blame for the state of affairs, the continuing chopper rides provided by Sri Lanka Air Force to Tiger commanders have become a subject of critical comment in the Colombo media.

The Sunday Times (14 November) reported that a Sri Lanka Air Force Bell 212 helicopter took off from its base in Hingurakgoda, near Minneriya, on Friday, 12 November, on a special mission. The first touch down was in Batticaloa. There Banu

(Somasekeran Sivananthan), the military wing leader for the district boarded the helicopter with two colleagues, Marshal and Kukanthan. The LTTE leadership had tasked Banu to restore full military control in this eastern district following the defection of its former commander Karuna. The helicopter then took off from Batticaloa and headed northwards. Some twenty minutes later, it landed in Sampur in the Trincomalee district. This village alongside Kattaiparichchan and Mutur overlooks the Trincomalee Harbour. Boarding the helicopter there was Sornam (Soosaipillai Joseph Anthonydas), military wing leader for Trincomalee, and colleagues Sudaroli and Ragulan. Sornam was moved to Trincomalee to replace Pathuman (Sivasubra-maniam Varathan), a close associate of Karuna. The SLAF helicopter was airborne again with six Tigers on board. It later touched down at the Central College Grounds in Kilinochchi.

The request from the LTTE for the provision of this helicopter facility to transport its commanders had come only a after the failure of the Norwegian delegation in their latest bid to resurrect peace talks between the Government and the LTTE. Their leader Velupillai Prabhakaran had summoned a meeting of "area commanders" and the presence of the military leaders for Batticaloa and Trincomalee was felt essential.

Meanwhile, the LTTE re-opened its first two political offices in the Batticaloa district, which were closed following a series of reported attacks by the Karuna faction. Military sources said two offices at Kalladi and Ariyampathy were opened in the morning of 15 November without any fanfare. They said the LTTE expected to open another two offices at Arsadi and Mamangama, which were now being repaired.

At last week's meeting attended by the security forces and the SLMM, the LTTE had said it was going to reopen its political offices in the district and had requested security for these political offices. The security forces' representatives had agreed to provide the requested security and said they did not objecting to the re opening but advised the LTTE not to hoist Tiger flags at the offices as they were in government-held areas

Meanwhile, the LTTE leadership has appointed a senior LTTE leader Ambumaran as the Political Head of the district with effect from yesterday. The post was kept vacant since the killing of Senadirajah a few months ago by Karuna loyalists.

● Court ruling against JHU

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court has ruled that the expulsion of Parliamentarian Ven. Apparekke Punnananda Thera from the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) to be invalid.

Delivering the unanimous judgment agreed by the rest of the Bench Justice Nihal Jayasinghe observed that the Court could not accept the position of the respondents that the petitioner had been a member of the first respondent party Jathika Hela Urumaya since respondents had failed to produce any proof to this effect, and "in the absence of such evidence it was not open for the JHU to ask the petitioner to show cause."

The judge further observed that the MoU signed between the JHU and six monks on February 17 to use the name and the symbol of the JHU at the then impending General Election would not be confined to the six monks, as contended by the JHU.

He noted that at the General Election held on April 2, nine candidates fielded by the JHU were returned as MPs. Therefore, the JHU should have fielded more than nine candidates at the election. It was evident that the JHU had not objected to field more than the six candidates at the Election and the JHU could not claim that MoU had been confined to the six monks.

Earlier, it was submitted on behalf of the dismissed monk that the MoU signed between the JHU and six monks extinguished whatever power the JHU had, to expel the petitioner even if the petitioner had been an implied member of the JHU. It was contended that since the petitioner was not a signatory to the MoU, he could not be bound by the contract entered by two parties although he had contested at the Election.

The petitioner stated that he was informed by letter dated August 18 that the Central Committee of the JHU had decided to expel him from the JHU, on the basis that he acted in violation of the party Constitution. The petitioner stated that the decision was illegal and had no force since the JHU had no constitution. He further claimed that he was only a member of the "Uttaritara Sanga Sabha", and was not a member of the JHU. The petitioner sought to determine the expulsion to be void and sought to continue as a Member of the Parliament.

● Alleged military buildup

The dispute over the alleged military buildup in the Trincomalee area in eastern Sri Lanka seems to be raising its head again. The Defence Ministry has informed the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to inquire further into the LTTE military build up around Trincomalee harbour since the Ministry cannot agree with the report submitted by them in this regard, according to Defence Secretary Cyril Heart. He claimed that at a meeting with SLMM Chief Trond Furuhovde on 15 November, the Army had provided additional information to the SLMM to further inquire into the matter since it was felt that the report submitted by the SLMM was lacking some information. He said the Defence Ministry has information from the intelligence reports and also from other sources about the existence LTTE camps in those areas.

"We do not agree with the SLMM that there are no LTTE camps around the Trincomalee harbour," Herat said adding that "the ministry handed another report with detailed evidence about the LTTE build-up around the harbour based on intelligence."

The SLMM following a complaint lodged by the Defence Ministry regarding the alleged LTTE military build up around Trincomalee harbour began investigations into the matter and handed over their report to the Peace Secretariat a few weeks back

The Peace Secretariat had later handed over the report to the Defence Ministry for its consideration. In their report, the SLMM indicated that all the LTTE installations the truce monitors visited were located well within the LTTE controlled areas and the truce monitors had not found any indication of an LTTE military build up around the harbour.

● Tigers acquire air-power?

Nov 7 - The LTTE has acquired two aircraft and a helicopter says a London-based prestigious international think tank. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) says in its latest publication that the Tamil Tigers are equipped with a light helicopter, the Robinson R44 Astro, and two light aircraft whose make has not been identified.

In its annual publication "Military Balance 2004-2005", IISS states that the LTTE has "1 Robinson R44 Astro lt (light) helicopter plus 2 lt ac (aircraft) for recce and liaison".

The IISS also states that the Tigers are reported to have some anti-tank guided weapons and surface-to-air missiles (SAM) besides being equipped with 122mm, 152mm artillery and 120mm mortars.

Asked for more details on the capabilities of LTTE aircraft and whether they could be armed and, if so, with what weapons Colonel Christopher Langton, Editor of Military Balance and Head of the Defence Analysis Department, told The Sunday Times(Colombo) that he could not "supply this information at the moment."

However, Col Langton did explain the linking of the Work

(continued on next page)

Deadlock: A mismatch between goals and expectations

Jehan Perera

Despite their inability to secure a pledge from the Government and LTTE to resume peace talks, the most recent visit by the high powered Norwegian delegation to Sri Lanka, comprising its Foreign Minister and other top facilitators, revealed that the peace process was in a stable condition. It is certainly unfortunate that the stability that exists today is the stability of a stalemate. But this is much better than the situation that existed 3 to 6 months ago, when there seemed to be the terrible prospect of a relapse back to regular large scale violence, and even war. At that time the rising incidents of violence, such as the attempted assassination of Minister Douglas Devananda in his ministerial office in the heart of Colombo, and the battles fought in the east between the LTTE and its breakaway group, seemed to threaten the very foundations of the ceasefire.

There were two positive features stemming from the Norwegian delegation's visit. The first was that Foreign Minister Jan Petersen was able to meet with both the government and LTTE leaderships, and was able to communicate their expectations and concerns to each other. Where there is no direct communication between parties in conflict there is a greater likelihood of misunderstandings that can give rise to additional problems. Peace talks have been stalled for over 20 months. The need for communications between the two sides is very high, and especially so where the LTTE leadership is concerned. The second positive feature is the Norwegian Foreign Minister's investment of time. This is a reassurance that Norway's commitment to Sri Lanka and its peace process remain high. Going by the words of the government and LTTE they both appreciate the facilitative role by Norway to the peace process.

Among the reasons why the peace process has remained intact and not degenerated into war, a primary reason would be the amount of international support provided to it. What started off as an exclusive Norwegian initiative in 2000 has now grown into a process that officially includes Japan, the US and the EU. Not even the change of government in April and its proactive role in trying to get Indian participation in the defence of the country has diminished the role of the international peace makers. The three global superpowers are co-chairs of the Tokyo Donor Conference that pledged USD 4.5 billion worth of economic aid to Sri Lanka in June 2003. The government and LTTE are both aware that their continued strength is dependent in significant measure on both the material and financial support of the international community.

Deadlocked

But the fact remains that the peace process remains at a deadlock. One factor that emerged most clearly from the inability of the latest Norwegian facilitative effort to secure a breakthrough in the peace process was the unwillingness of the government and LTTE to budge from their respective positions and make a deadlock-breaking concession to the other. The essence of conflict resolution is to work out mutually beneficial solutions that make both sides better off. But this requires an ability to put oneself in the shoes of the other, see problems and issues from the other's perspective and a willingness to adjust one's own position so that the problems faced by the other are reduced.

Unfortunately it appears that the Norwegian facilitators have been unable to persuade the government and LTTE to show more solicitude for each other's difficulties. The LTTE has remained adamant not to accept the government's requirement that the future rounds of peace talks should include a discussion of core issues and final solution. This would satisfy the JVP and Sinhalese nationalist constituency who are deeply suspicious of interim arrangements that are not rooted in a framework that envisions a united Sri Lanka. The LTTE appears resolute about seeking a maximum of powers for the ISGA when it comes to negotiations.

A perusal of the LTTE's proposal for an Interim Self Governing Authority would reveal them to be separatist in orientation rather than unification-oriented. The ISGA proposal seeks to legitimise LTTE-created new institutions of governance for the entirety of the north east, even though they have no connection with institutions that exist in the rest of the country. Any peace talks that lead to the setting up of an interim administration on the basis of the ISGA alone would tend to consolidate their separatist orientation. This appears to be the LTTE's strong preference.

The LTTE has explained its reluctance to discuss core issues on the grounds that the government would use the core issues as a delaying tactic. But the irony is that the LTTE does not seem to mind the delay that is taking place in the peace process due to its intransigence on this very issue. This would deepen the suspicion of the government that the LTTE is, in fact, seeking to avoid a discussion on the core issues as it does not wish to have its ISGA proposal brought into a frame that is federal and united. On the other hand, the government itself appears to be having a yet not fully disclosed political agenda that blocks it from going into peace talks with the sincere intent of establishing an interim administration for the north east.There clearly

(continued from page 8)

Tamil Movement and the World Tamil Association with the LTTE, as shown under the head "Selected Non-State Armed Groups". "The World Tamil Association and the World Tamil Movement are identified as 'front' organisations for the LTTE. The LTTE may operate abroad under those names sometimes, but this is considered to be fairly rare." The two names do not designate other armed groups linked to the LTTE., Col Langton said.

It has been suspected for some time that the LTTE was trying to obtain some air power and the discovery of an airstrip somewhere in the Wanni earlier this year appeared to clinch the suspicion. However, no outside agency, particularly a think-tank also dedicated to accessing and logging the military capabilities of states and non-state armed groups, had so categorically stated the presence of aircraft in the hands of the LTTE. While the make of the two light aircraft is not in the public domain, some information is available about the R44 Astro helicopter. It is believed that this was developed by an American aeronautical manufacturer Robinson from its early version, the R22.

The R44, which was first produced and delivered in 1993, is believed to have a more capable engine and a higher capacity. It is a fast, high performance 4-place helicopter and is said to have a rugged reliability and is easy to maintain at a low cost. The Astro is understood to have a cruising speed of 209 km/hour and a service ceiling of 4265 metres. ❑

needs to be some sort of interim arrangement made to ensure both legitimate governance and economic reconstruction in the north east pending a final settlement. It must be recalled that at the December 2001 general election, the victorious UNF headed by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe promised not only a ceasefire but also an interim administration for the LTTE to run. It was on the basis of this electoral promise that the LTTE signed the Ceasefire Agreement with the former Prime Minister. It is reasonable for the LTTE to expect this promise to be delivered by the successor government.

However, it does not appear that the government is thinking in those terms of honouring the LTTE's expectations. The government is aware that any interim administration for the north east that is headed by the LTTE would be extremely controversial among the Sinhalese people. It could cause division and conflict among the majority of the people. In addition the government would not wish to cause a rift within its constituent parties, such as the Sinhalese nationalist JVP, as it seems to be contemplating an election or referendum in the coming year. The JVP has consistently been opposed to the devolution of power and an interim administration that is dominated by the LTTE.

There are signs that the government's priority issue at this time is the future of President Chandrika Kumaratunga who is in the last stages of her second and final term as Executive President. Whether her remaining term is for one year or two, is a politically contested issue. Therefore at this critical time it is unlikely that the government would wish to create controversy among the people and its coalition partners by implementing an ISGA as demanded by the LTTE. Instead the government would prefer to wait.

However, the government might wish to show the people and international community that it is serious about the peace process by engaging in other important activities such as giving publicity to the functioning of the National Advisory Committee on peace and reconciliation. But it would prefer to steer clear of negotiations regarding an interim administration that is going to be dominated by the LTTE. In turn this would deepen the LTTE's suspicion that the government's insistence on discussing core issues and the final solution are but a means to delay the implementation of an ISGA.

The analysis above would suggest that the due to a combination of mistrust and narrow political agendas, both the government and LTTE would actually prefer the present stalemate to continue. The government, for instance, could lose its Parliamentary majority if the JVP decides that an interim administration to the LTTE is intolerable to them. The government could lose its option of changing the constitution and ensuring President Kumaratnga's political future if it brings the issue of an interim administration into the constitutional debate. On the other hand, if the LTTE were to agree to discuss core issues in addition to its ISGA proposals it would not realise its ambition of obtaining an interim administration that is unfettered by the constraints and power sharing checks and balances of federalism.

Objective interests of both parties

Getting back to the negotiating table is very clearly in the objective interests of both the Government and the LTTE. The question is to figure why they are continuing to delay when they could benefit greatly by resuming their peace talks.

The Government's interest in getting back to the negotiating table would stem primarily from the condition laid down by the international donors at the Tokyo donor conference of June 2003. At that conference, the international donors pledged a very generous sum of US$ 4.5 billion in aid over a four-year period. But they made the disbursement of that large sum of money conditional upon the satisfactory progress of the peace process. The Government's primary interest in recommencing the peace talks would stem from its urgent need to obtain an inflow of substantial external funding to bridge the budget deficit. The Government's political future most critically depends on the revival of the health of the economy, which is being subjected to sharp inflationary pressures at the present time.

On the LTTE's side too there is a real need to get the peace process under way. But for the LTTE, their interest would be less in terms of obtaining economic aid than in directly consolidating their political and military control on the ground. Certainly, obtaining economic aid to bring the peace dividend to the long-suffering people of the north-east would be an important consideration for the LTTE. In fact they have constantly justified their demand for an interim self governing authority for the north-east on the basis of satisfying the developmental and economic needs of the people. But the LTTE leadership has also made it clear, time and again, that obtaining political control is of greater importance to them than obtaining economic resources.

The LTTE's need to utilise any forthcoming peace talks, as a vehicle to strengthen their control on the ground, would have got more urgent in view of the crisis situation that exists in the east. After the revolt by its eastern commander Karuna, who broke away from the LTTE, there is a vacuum of control in the east. Most of the LTTE's political offices in Batticaloa remain closed, as they are vulnerable to attack by the Karuna group. But if the LTTE can obtain political control over the north-east, by means of an interim self governing authority, such as they have proposed, it may become easier for them to completely eradicate the influence now wielded by Karuna, his remaining fighters and his political party in the east.

The priority given by the LTTE to political and military control, as against economic matters, can be seen quite clearly in their proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA). Only three of the 23 clauses pertaining to the ISGA are concerned with economic or developmental issues. These three clauses deal with the subjects of rehabilitation, reconstruction and resettlement. The balance 19 clauses are concerned with issues of political and military control and governance, such as the high security zones, the coastal waters, and law and order issues, elections, human rights and other governance issues.

Mismatch between goals and expectations

What the above analysis suggests is that there is a major mismatch between the goals and expectations of the Government and the LTTE. The Government seeks to obtain economic resources as its primary goal while the LTTE seeks control on the ground as its primary goal. It is this mismatch that is creating suspicion and doubt in the minds of the two parties, regarding each other. The LTTE's concern would be that the Government is only seeking to restart the peace talks in order to open the purse strings of the international donors. The LTTE would be suspicious that the Government has no real intention of providing the LTTE with an interim administration of the kind they seek, as an outcome of the peace talks.

On the other hand, the Government's concern would be that the LTTE's inten-

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tion in restarting the peace talks is simply to obtain the implementation of its far reaching ISGA proposals. These proposals seek the legalisation of LTTE-created institutions, such as its police, judiciary and the proposed auditor general, although they will have no relationship to existing national institutions. The LTTE's evident unwillingness to consider linkage with national institutions, and the implication that they seek total control, makes the situation more difficult from the Government's point of view. The LTTE has recently been seeking to backtrack on the commitment they made at the Oslo round of peace talks in December 2002, where they agreed to explore a federal solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. The mismatch between the goals and expectations of the Government and LTTE, with regard to the peace talks, would stand as the biggest obstacle to their resumption. It is unlikely that the visit of the high powered Norwegian delegation to Sri Lanka this week can change this mismatch in the short term. In fact, the Norwegians appear to be cognisant of the challenge they face. Their Foreign Minister has already stated that their visit should not generate too many expectations. He has pointed out that the messages he is receiving from the parties are not very positive ones. The highly publicised excerpts from the forthcoming book by LTTE ideologue Dr Anton Balasingham, distancing the LTTE from the federal consensus at Oslo, would be one example. However, by utilising their unique access to the very highest in the leadership of the two sides and, by clarifying the nature of the mismatch, the Norwegian facilitators can contribute much, to preparing the ground for future peace talks. There are two key areas in particular where the Norwegian facilitators could make a valuable contribution. The first would be to convince the LTTE leadership that the legitimacy of the ISGA proposal hinges upon a willingness to work within the parameters of the Oslo agreement on federalism. Unless the ISGA is amended to include the shared rule component of federalism, it will be impossible for any Sri Lankan government to hand over parts of the country to be ruled by an unelected, separate and unaccountable organisation.

Norwegian position

The Norwegian facilitators are in a particularly strong position to impress upon the LTTE the need for a federal solution. At the very outset of their publicly announced entry into the Sri Lankan peace process, they announced the broad political parameters within which they would function. They publicly stated that their facilitation was conditional upon the two parties accepting a common framework of a united Sri Lanka in which Tamil aspirations would be substantially met. By agreeing to Norwegian facilitation and by entering into the Norwegian-facilitated peace process, the LTTE implicitly agreed to the parameters that the Norwegians set for their facilitation.

The second key area for the Norwegians to contribute to would be in respect of the approach adopted towards the peace process. Both parties would need to reorient themselves to approach the peace process in a manner that would ensure that both parties gain, rather than only one party gaining while the other party loses. The episode of the breakaway LTTE eastern commander Karuna, and the complicity of sections of the Government in it, would be an example of one party seeking to gain at the expense of the other. Certainly the LTTE was

(continued on next page)

Lanka facing exchange crisis

Nov 11 - Sri Lanka has admitted it faced a foreign exchange crisis triggered off by

Rising global oil prices and a slowdown in aid flows due to the uncertainty about the peace process have triggered off a foreign exchange crisis in Sri Lanka prompting the government take harsh measures.

Taxes of 10 to 20 percent would be imposed on imported processed food, fruit, vegetables, perfumes, footwear, ceramic ware and household appliances to tackle the crisis, the finance ministry said. "This is one of the measures taken by the government to discourage the importation of non-essential items in view of the foreign exchange crisis faced by the government," the ministry said in a statement.

It said surging world prices for oil had depleted foreign exchange reserves. Reserves had also been hit by slower development aid inflows, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said, as a result of the stalling of a peace talks with Tamil Tigers.

Foreign donors who pledged 4.5 billion dollars in Tokyo in June 2003 have called for progress in the peace process before releasing the aid to be spread over four years. The rebels have rejected any linkage between aid and the peace process.

Sri Lanka last month sharply raised import taxes on cars, vans and dump trucks, saying at the time the move was aimed at reducing pollution. But official sources said it was due to the foreign exchange crunch. Finance secretary P. B. Jayasundera said last month reserves had fallen to 1.9 billion dollars from 2.23 billion in December 2003.

Foreign exchange troubles have been aggravated by a fall in the value of Sri Lanka's rupee, which has tumbled over 7.0 percent against the dollar so far this year after remaining broadly steady in 2003.

On 10 November, Sri Lanka's central bank raised benchmark interest rates by half a percentage point amid rising inflation, a widening trade deficit and a foreign exchange crisis. The Bank raised its overnight repurchase rate from 7.0 percent to 7.5 percent and its reverse repo rate from 8.5 percent to 9.0 percent.

The move came two days after the finance ministry admitted for the first time that the country was facing a foreign exchange crisis and slapped higher taxes on luxury goods to discourage imports.

The Bank said inflation, which had eased from the start of 2002 and hit the lowest level of 3.7 percent in April, had begun to climb sharply. Inflation as measured by the broadbased Sri Lanka Consumers' Price index rose to 14.4 percent at the end of last month compared to 4.1 percent a year earlier. Trade figures were also worse than expected. The trade deficit widened to 1.57 billion dollars in the first nine months of this year compared to a shortfall of 940 million in the corresponding period last year.

Call to stop political killings

Nov 1 - "Peace' or a 'Ceasefire' that cannot prevent political killings and abductions cannot be considered as true 'peace' or 'ceasefire.' We believe that the Sri Lankan Government and the International community should accept this reality, although it is late now. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure the security and the 'right to live' for the people of this country.The International community should also pressure the LTTE to stop these brutal killings and abductions rather than restrict their responsibility by issuing statements," a joint statement, issued by the heads of the forum of political parties and civil organisations, against political killings and abductions said.

The joint statement was issued at the first meeting of the Forum held on 31 October at the BMICH in Colombo with the participation of five political parties and six civil organisations.

The statement said: "Political killings and abductions have become the order of the day in most parts of our country today. It is well established beyond any doubt that the LTTE is responsible for most of these killings and abductions, which are taking place not only in North and East of the country but also in places like Colombo and its suburbs. Members and supporters of Tamil political parties or any Tamil civilians who do not subscribe to the policies and ideologies of the LTTE are being systematically murdered. Further, there have been frequent reports confirmed by international Human Rights watch groups that school going children are being abducted and forcibly recruited for military training and activities of the LTTE.

Muslim and Sinhala citizens in the North and Eastern province are also being victimized by the LTTE. It has become very common for the LTTE to abduct or kill civilians of this area who refuses to pay extortion as demanded by them.

All these political killings and abductions are committed by the LTTE since signing of the Ceasefire Agreement, which

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weakened by to this incident. But the covert support given to Karuna added to the mistrust between the two sides that continues to hold up the peace process to the detriment of virtually everyone.

Most scholars of peace processes, worldwide, advocate conflict resolution strategies in which there are mutual gains for both sides. A model to follow in this regard might be the Camp David Accords of 1976 that have ensured peace between Israel and Egypt for nearly three decades. At these peace talks, the US government was the mediator and recognised that Israel's interest was security while Egypt's interest was in its national sovereignty. The US mediators made this fact, that the interests of the two parties differed, actually work for a solution. They mediated a settlement whereby Israel gave back the Sinai desert that it had captured from Egypt while Egypt demilitarised the Sinai. Both parties gained from the negotiations.

The CFA that has become Sri Lanka's most precious possession today had the positive feature that it enabled both parties to gain. The peace process was strongest during its initial stages when the Government and the LTTE considered each other to be partners in the peace process. It was only when they began to see that their interests were opposed, at least in some areas, that the relationship began to suffer and with it the peace process also suffered. The facilitators must show the parties that there are negotiating options by which, economic resources, development and responsible autonomy can be found to meet their legitimate needs and expectations. ❑

has taken away the right of all other Tamil Political Parties to carry arms for their self defence, except the LTTE.

More than one hundred people have been murdered so far by the LTTE in this manner and thousands have been victims of their atrocities. The list includes former Members of Parliament, sitting and former Pradeshiya Sabha members and Chairman and political party heads and organisers. Former Member of Parliament Kingsley Rasanayagam was killed by the LTTE recently in the Government controlled area in Batticaloa District. A female LTTE cadre had made an attempt for a suicidal attack on EPDP Leader Douglas Devananda, in July this year. Had that attempt been successful, the country would have lost a prominent Tamil political leader.

In short, to date the LTTE has failed to abide by the conditions of the Ceasefire agreement.

The Ceasefire Agreement, signed between the then Government and the LTTE, has almost given free licence for the LTTE to murder Tamil politicians and civilians who are not in agreement with them or defy to abide by their dictum.

From the start, the Ceasefire Monitors have been silent spectators over these incidents. Unfortunately, in order to avoid any breakdown in the peace process, the Sri Lankan Government was avoiding any situation that would antagonise the LTTE thus placing the Government in a difficult position in carrying out its responsibility of maintaining law and order in the country. This has resulted in a situation - where none of the law enforcing authorities was prepared to take any effective measures to prevent these political killings and abductions. This has lead to widespread fear and distrust amongst the people.

'Peace' or 'ceasefire' that cannot prevent these political killings and abductions cannot be considered as true 'peace' or 'ceasefire'. We believe that the Sri Lankan Government and the International Community should accept this reality, although it is late now. It is the responsibility of the Government to ensure the security and the "right to live" for the people of this country.. International community should also pressurise the LTTE to stop these brutal killings and abductions rather than restricting their responsibility by issuing statements. We strongly believe that any party that is genuinely interested in establishing peace in this country would come forward to do so.

The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Tamileela Ikkiya Viduthalai Munnani (TIVM) Patriotic National Movement (PNM), National Bhikku Front (NBF), National University Teachers Alliance (NUTA), Neganhira Uadanaya, People's Artistes, and Students for Human Rights participated in the first meeting of the Forum.

Undivided SL India's aim

Following discussions with Indian leaders during the recent visit of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, a joint communiqué was issued the text of which is as follows:

Agreeing that "there could be no justification for terrorism, be it political, religious or ideological", India and Sri Lanka on Saturday (6 November) resolved to enter into a bilateral Defence Co-operation Agreement and a separate pact on the rehabilitation of the strategic Palaly airbase

India also reiterated its support for the process of seeking a comprehensive negotiated settlement acceptable to all communities in Sri Lanka within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and consistent with democracy and respect for individual rights.

"India maintains an abiding interest in the security of Sri Lanka and remains committed to its unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity, India favours the early resumption of negotiations pertaining to the peace process. Any interim arrangement should be an integral part of an enduring final settlement that maintains the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and ensures the safety well-being and prosperity of the people," an Indo-Lanka joint statement said.

"During discussions on the Defence Co-operation Agreement it was resolved that a bilateral Defence Co-operation Agreement and the MOU on the Rehabilitation of the Airfield in Palaly would be signed between the two Governments on mutually convenient dates. The Indian side also agreed to carry out the refit of the Sri Lankan Naval Ship "Sayura" and underwrite the costs," it said. The statement was released in New Delhi at the end of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's five-day visit to the Indian capital.

"Both sides remain deeply committed to opposing terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. They agreed that there could be no justification for terrorism, be it political, religious or ideological. There was also a meeting of minds on the need for urgent reform of the UN system to meet global challenges. Including the expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council, India expressed its sincere appreciation of Sri Lanka's endorsement of India's candidature for the permanent membership of the UN Security Council. They also agreed to cooperate in other forums, including the WTO."

"Both sides expressed deep satisfaction of the dynamism and energy in bilateral economic ties since the entry into force of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISLFTA) in March 2000. Both sides expressed happiness that bilateral trade has exceeded US$ 1.5 billion in 2003-04. Consideration will be given to establish a Joint Working Group to keep under review any practical problems arising out of the implementation of the FTA. They resolved to inject impetus to the process of further economic integration of the two economies by expediting negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries."

"It was noted that India is the second highest tourism generating country in Sri Lanka and the number of Sri Lankan Airline flights into various cities in India has reached 77 per week, which is the highest number of flights to India by any airline. The relatively new destinations introduced are Bangalore, Hyderabad and Bodh Gaya."

"The President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India agreed that the US$ 100 million credit line offered by India for the development of Rural Infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka would be used for setting up of vocational training institutes in various parts of the country ranging from the south to the north-east, rural feeder roods, water supply development schemes, community development projects, rural telephony and refurbishing of the road between Anuradhapura and Trincomalee, which is to be named the Rajiv Gandhi Amity Highway. The credit line is aimed at creating durable infrastructure and providing training and employment opportunities to

people in rural areas."

"The utilisation of the credit line for US$ 150 million for the purchase of petroleum products, signed on 15th October was also discussed.

"The two sides agreed to explore the possibilities of intensification of co-operation in the power sector."

"The two sides decided to expedite the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Fisheries, presently under consideration. While agreeing to continue with the existing understandings on the humane treatment and early release of apprehended fishermen, it was decided to constitute a Joint Working Group which could meet frequently to deal with issues relating to straying fisherman, work out modalities for prevention of use of force against them and the early release of confiscated boats, and explore possibilities of working towards bilateral arrangements for licensed fishing."

"The two sides noted that cultural exchanges is an area which has great scope in bringing the two peoples together. There have always been an interest in each other's cultures due to the synergies and diversities, which offer many opportunities for fruitful co-operation. Booth sides agreed that the Cultural Exchange Programme, which was signed in October 2003, needs to be actively implemented."

"The Sri Lankan side proposed that a lecture titled "Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Oration" should be jointly organised annually by the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS) and the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. The first lecture would be delivered by President Kumaratunga, it was also suggested that a unit be set up in the BCIS titled "Centre for India Sri Lanka Studies". The Indian side welcomed the proposals."

"With regard to activities relating to Buddhism, the Sri Lanka side took up with the Indian side the possibilities of obtaining concessions on the entrance fees to Buddhist pilgrim sites in India and exemption of visa fees for Buddhist pilgrims Sri Lanka expressed appreciation for the Indian assistance to repair the Mulkirigala Temple at Hambantota and Thiruketheeswaram Temple complex in Mannar."

"It was noted with satisfaction that the Indian offer of a grant of US$ 7.5 million to build a state-of-the-art Cancer Hospital in Sri Lanka would be expedited by the visit of an Indian technical team in Sri Lanka next week."

"On the question of the Sethusamudram Canal Project it was agreed that an exchange of views on the economic and environmental aspects in relation to Sri Lanka would be arranged between the technical experts of India and Sri Lanka."

LTTE opposes defence pact with India

There was flurry of speculation that the much talked about Defence Co-orporation Agreement between Sri Lanka and India would be finalized and even signed when President Kumaratunga visited India early this month. But the joint communiqué issued following her visit stated that the Agreement was to be finalized to be signed in the near future, but no date was given. The communiqué also referred to the proposed Indian assistance to Sri Lanka in the project to refurbish and upgrade the Palaly Airport situated in northern Jaffna.

The LTTE has expressed vehement opposition to the proposed Agreement saying that such a pact would tilt the military balance that now exists between the LTTE and the Government in favour of the latter, and thereby prejudice the present ceasefire and the peace process.

In this connection, the LTTE's website quoted the chief political advisor of the LTTE, Mr Anton Balasingham, as saying, "Connected to this Indian visit is the collective Tamil thinking of the proposed defence pact that the Tamil people view that such an agreement is irrelevant during the time of a peace process, suspended though, but altogether not given up and therefore would tilt the military equilibrium, the underlying principle of the CFA. We have conveyed this collective Tamil thinking to India."

In a later interview with Colombo newspaper, Anton Balasingham had reportedly said, "As I said I cannot comment fully on anything positive coming out of the establishment of the new agreement between India and Sri Lanka. All I can say is that this is not the type of role the Tamil people wanted India to play. We wanted India to emerge as a country which understood the Tamil cause and which would play a positive role in the peace process. We cannot describe the joint agreement as something positive. All I can say is that nothing good will come out of the Joint Agreement with India. It is uncalled for."

"I have no idea what is in the agreement. I just see the agreement as something negative. Nothing good could come out of it. We saw what happened when India last got involved in the Sri Lanka conflict. It had to send a large contingent of the Indian Peace Keeping Force. The Tamils fear that the government is readying itself to build up its military might with the help of India," Mr Balasingham said.

In the meantime, the LTTE has said that India should consult it before undertaking strategically important infrastructure projects in the North Eastern Province (NEP) of Sri Lanka, since these impinge on the lives of the Tamil people. The Tamil daily Virakesari (14 November) reported that the LTTE's political wing leader, S P Tamilselvan, when asked to comment on India's willingness to upgrade the Palaly military airport in Jaffna and build a highway between Trincomalee and Anuradhapura to be called the 'Rajiv Gandhi Highway', had said, "The Palaly airport is in the Tamil Homeland. India's plan to help upgrade it will upset the current peace process in Sri Lanka. The Palaly airport was built by taking over the Tamil peoples' lands. As for the Trincomalee-Anuradhapura highway, it is going to be built in an area, from which the Tamils were driven out to enable the Sinhala people to settle there. Tamil refugees from this area are still languishing in Mullaitivu district. It is our submission that before taking a decision on these matters India should consult the Tamil side also. It should talk to the LTTE."

During the five-day official visit of the Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga to India earlier this month, New Delhi had agreed to build a modern highway between Trincomalee in the Tamil North East and Anurdhapura in the Sinhala heartland. It would be named after the former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who was killed by a LTTE suicide bomber in May 1991.

India and Sri Lanka are also discussing the prospect of signing an MOU on upgrading the Palaly airport. The current discussions are on the issue of mutual consultations regarding the use of the airfield and restrictions on its use. India has been saying that only Indian and Sri Lankan aircraft should be allowed to use it. But Sri Lanka is against any such restriction.

Meanwhile, the well known lobbyist for the LTTE in New Delhi, the Marumalarchi Dravida Munntra Kazhagam leader V Gopalswamy (Vaiko), has urged the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, not to enter into any defence cooperation agreement with Sri Lanka. Mr. Vaiko met Dr. Singh and sought to impress upon him the need to drop the proposal for repairing the Palaly Airfield and refitting the Sri Lankan naval ship, 'Sayura.' Mr. Vaiko later told the media that Dr. Singh assured him that the Government would not take any step that would be against the welfare of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

In his three-page memorandum to the Prime Minister, Mr. Vaiko said that, "it is an undeniable fact that the Palaly Airfield was utilised by the Sri Lankan Air Force for bombing the entire Jaffna region" including civilian areas in 1995. "The Sri Lankan Government is trying to strengthen its military might. If confrontation breaks out between the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamils of Jaffna,.... the Sri Lankan Air Force will definitely use Palaly Airfield for bombing Tamil areas."

Mr. Vaiko said that it was his "bounden duty" to caution the Indian Government that in such an eventuality, India would be blamed for enabling the Sri Lankan Government to attack Tamils. As for refitting 'Sayura' and under-writing the costs, he drew Dr. Singh's attention to the fact that the Sri Lankan Navy had attacked Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu in international waters and even in "our territorial waters."

Delhi declaration

Meanwhile, a conference of 'concerned persons' organized by the controversial Indian politician, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, in New Delhi issued a 'Delhi Declaration' stating to the effect that a solution to the current problem of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka should not be so structured as to reward terrorism or permit any terrorist outfit on either side of the divide to gain in legitimacy or in access to authority of the state.

The conference on "India's Sri Lanka's policy objectives, priorities and strategy" was held on 30 \october, in New Delhi presided over by Dr. Subramanian Swamy, a former Law and Commerce Minister of India.

Reportedly, more than 40 academics, political leaders, and speakers participated in the one-day conference. The conference got underway with a call by Dr. Subramanian Swamy, that the conference should focus, among other things, on a possible option for India to intervene at the invitation of the Sri Lankan government.

The conference adopted the 'Delhi Declaration' and accordingly, part of it urged that, whatever solution is found, India should ensure that the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is not forgotten, but that those accused in the proceedings before the court conducting the trial, and declared to be proclaimed offenders are brought to book under the law. It also stated that India should not endorse any solution unless this minimum condition is met.

The full text of the unanimously adopted Delhi Declarations are as follows:

1. This Conference declares that a solution to the current problem of linguistic divide in Sri Lanka should not be so structured as to reward terrorism or permit any terrorist outfit on either side of the divide to gain in legitimacy or in access to authority of the state. Hence, this Conference rejects the concept that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) can be sole spokesperson agency of the minority Tamils of the island nation. To that extent, this Conference calls upon the concerned international community to ensure that any peace talks in the Sri Lanka is broad based and inclusive, and that in finding a solution take all interests and parties in the divide into account.

Furthermore, whatever solution is found, India should ensure that the assassination of former Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi is not forgotten, but that those accused in the proceedings before the court conducting the trial, and declared to be proclaimed offenders are brought to book under the law. India should not endorse any solution unless this minimum condition is met.

2. This Conference declares that the clear and appropriate solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka arising out of a linguistic divide is a properly safeguarded under a federal constitution. The safeguards are to ensure that basic federal structure of the said constitution cannot be amended in the future by a parliamentary majority vote and that the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka is sanctified beyond challenge.

Since such a solution has universal appeal as also acceptance of the peace loving and democratic people on both sides of the linguistic divide, and wide international applicability, hence the Sri Lanka government should obtain the necessary parliamentary approval and declare its intention to replace the present unitary constitution with such a federal constitution when peace in the country prevails.

This Conference declares that the international community and India in particular, should assist the Sri Lanka government to ensure that the essential peaceful environment prevails to implement such a federal constitution. Hence, any outfit or organization that seeks to block the implementation of such a constitution or disrupt the peaceful environment should be treated as a terrorist organization and dealt as such by the international community within the framework of the UN Resolution on Terrorism.

Plea for Release of Hostages

Oct 31 Relatives of the Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi truck drivers kidnapped in Iraq pleaded for their lives, as authorities in the two countries said they were doing their best to secure the release of the men.

The truckers were seized on Thursday, 28 October, by the Islamic Army in Iraq, which, according to Al-Jazeera television, released a statement saying "the two hostages were abducted before driving their trucks into a US base in Iraq". A video with the name of the extremist group showed each of the presumed hostages separately and a number of identification documents, including a Kuwaiti driving license.

The Sri Lankan driver, Dinesh Dharmendran Rajaratnam, a father of three children aged 10, 12 and 14, had gone to Kuwait last year hoping to earn enough to provide a better education for his children, his brother-in-law Pullaiya Suresh told the press.

The 36-year-old had told his family three weeks earlier that he was desperate to return home, Suresh said. "He wanted us to send a fax message to his employer saying that there was

a very pressing need for him to return home immediately," he said. He was unhappy as he was not paid the salary that was promised.

The family, which said they had paid 68,000 rupees (650 dollars) to secure the driver's job in Kuwait, said Raharatnam's wife and children would be destitute unless the militants freed him. "We have not had any information from the authorities here, all we know is only through the international media. We want to go to the Kuwaiti embassy tomorrow to try and get more information," Suresh said.

Sri Lanka has no diplomatic mission in Iraq and four months ago discouraged its nationals from going there in search of employment. Foreign ministry officials said they were working with the Sri Lankan mission in Lebanon to secure the release of the first Sri Lankan hostage in Iraq.

Sri Lanka's Muslim Media Forum and the Muslim Leagues Youth Foundation appealed to Rajaratnam's abductors to free him on humanitarian grounds. "In this holy month of Ramadan, we appeal to his captors to release our fellow Sri Lankan brother on humanitarian grounds," said Muslim Media Forum chief N. M. Ameen.

The wife of abducted Bangladeshi truck driver, Abul Kashem, 42, meanwhile, appealed to the Dhaka government and international organisations to help secure his release. "My husband is the only shelter that I have in this whole world and I want him to be back with us," his wife Naznin Akhter told the press. "We want the government and international organisations to secure his life," she said.

Dhaka has appealed for Kashem's release. Bangladesh Foreign Minister M. Morsehed Khan said that his country was not involved in the war in Iraq and that the abductors had yet to make contact with the government. "I make an appeal on behalf of 140 million Muslims to the hostage takers to release the poor Bangladeshi driver," he said.

Forces accuse SLMM of inaction

A high level security forces and police delegation on 31 October accused the Scandinavian truce monitors of sitting on their complaints relating to indiscriminate LTTE cease-fire violations in the Ampara-Batticaloa sector. The delegation expressed serious concern over the monitors' obvious failure to investigate complaints at a tri-partite meeting, at the Vavunativu Divisional Secretariat, chaired by the outgoing second-in-command of the Norwegian-led mission, Hagrup Haukland.

The security forces delegation comprised Gen. Officer Commanding Army's 23 Division Brig. Vajira Wijegoonewardene, Batticaloa Brigade Commander Colonel Laksiri Amaratunga, SSP Mahesh Samaradivakara and SSP Wasantha Ratnayake. The LTTE delegation had been led by their regional political leader Kausalyan.

The government delegation had emphasised that they were not satisfied with the way the truce monitors handled complaints. Brig. Wijegoonewardene, during the discussion, had stressed that the security forces should be given periodic progress reports. He had suggested that the truce monitors conduct comprehensive investigations into abductions and disappearances. He had pointed out the absurdity in asking the LTTE for information on the missing persons knowing that they were responsible for the abductions.

The Brigadier had urged the truce monitors to visit LTTE-held areas to look for the missing persons.

The security forces dismissed Haukland's claim that the gangsters and criminals were responsible for a spate of incidents in the area. They expressed disbelief that that the Norwegian was so na'EFve to blame the ongoing wave of incidents on the underworld. The forces stressed that the LTTE was responsible for violations including the recent killing of ex-TNA MP Kingsley Rasanayagam. The forces identified the LTTE hit men who carried out the recent political assassination in Batticaloa. The LTTE delegation had not responded to this.

The forces took up the position that it would be easier to restore normalcy if the LTTE respected the Oslo-arranged Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA). While denying any link with the breakaway Karuna faction, the forces delegation emphasised the security forces had nothing to do with the battle between the Vanni and Batticaloa factions.

The forces delegation explained the action taken by security forces against persons carrying arms irrespective of their loyalties to the LTTE. This point was proved when the LTTE delegation thanked the STF for killing a Karuna loyalist shortly after he gunned down a middle-level LTTE leader.

Following the meeting with the LTTE, the security forces chiefs briefed the visiting Japanese peace envoy Yasushi Akashi at the Batticaloa Brigade headquarters. The forces explained the difference between the warring LTTE factions, while emphasising the fact that Karuna was liked by the vast majority as he stopped taxation, abductions and harassment metered out to the civilians, particularly the Muslims.

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'Oslo Declaration' turns into a bad dream

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

Both adversaries, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have ruled out a military solution to the North-East (N-E) conflict. The LTTE after six rounds of peace talks with the previous UNF government between September 2002 and March 2003 withdrew in April 2003 alleging the government had failed to act on the promises given earlier and was not serious about restoring normality in the North-East. The Tigers also wanted conditions to be created for the displaced people to resettle in their homes and pursue their livelihoods freely. The international community has been in the forefront urging both sides to resume direct talks since the breakdown but yet there are no signs of early start.

Meanwhile, the LTTE changed its strategy and put forward its own proposals for setting up in the Northeast an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) on 31 October 2003. But these are unacceptable to the Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamil parties except LTTE's proxy the TNA. There are also no backers for the proposals amongst the international community. The southern polity is deeply divided on the political solution to the North-East issue. The JVP, a key partner in the present coalition government has rejected the ISGA proposals. It is against restarting the talks solely on this basis. The obstacles to political settlement have become increasingly apparent after the LTTE submitted its ISGA proposals. Since the Thimpu talks in 1985, the LTTE has entered talks with an exit strategy or as in the recent case give some seemingly credible reasons to withdraw. None of the talks reached the stage of discussing the core issues necessary for reaching a political settlement.

Fundamental differences

Sumanasiri Liyanage, social science lecturer, University of Peradeniya in his article (Daily News 30 October 2004) has argued that "although the immediate resumption of talks between the LTTE and the GoSL may contribute to the peace process by generating new hopes about the possibility of achieving a negotiated settlement to the ethno-political conflict in Sri Lanka, the immediate resumption of formal talks in itself would not be a major breakthrough and the failure to handle the negotiation process properly may produce adverse results."

Liyanage like many others has considered the conflict from a broad perspective calling it 'the ethno-political conflict' but to the LTTE it is a dispute mainly over control of land between two independent politico-military authorities with one functioning informally. Ethno-nationalism is used to mobilise support for a separatist project.

From LTTE's standpoint, the dispute over land claimed by the LTTE as Tamil homeland has to be settled first before discussing the future role of the GoSL there. Presently the LTTE considers any discussion on suitable federal structure is irrelevant as this is not the issue to be settled now. Moreover, it considers any discussion on this subject will prejudice its claim that the N-E region is Tamil homeland and it is for the authority there to decide later on internal and external matters including relationship with the government in Colombo. Other matters of major concern to the LTTE are - border control, security or defence, finance, law and order, judiciary, development, administration and in general the political system that has adequate powers to protect these rights. The ISGA proposals have been formulated on the premise that the LTTE has not surrendered these rights to the GoSL.

The LTTE's campaign to eliminate political opponents in the N-E shows that it is not prepared to give any significant participatory role for other parties in the N-E administration. In this backdrop, it is mere wishful thinking that the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran can be persuaded to amend significantly the structure implicit in the ISGA proposals to match with any known federal system. It is unrealistic to expect that he will voluntarily give up the basic concepts to which he has been clinging on steadfastly since launching the armed struggle and opt for a political settlement based on a federal system that limits autonomy to some specified areas.

Oslo Declaration

The LTTE has rejected the Sri Lankan government's demand that it publicly reiterates its commitment to finding a solution within a united Sri Lanka as per the Oslo 'Declaration' of December 5, 2002. The LTTE now states there is no joint declaration to this effect and the Oslo Statement is not a binding agreement between the negotiating parties but only an announcement by the Royal Norwegian Government at the end of the third round of peace talks in Oslo.

The LTTE has pointed out that the Norwegian government's statement merely says that the two parties have agreed to "explore" the possibility of finding a solution within a sovereign, united, Sri Lanka. Thus, there is no commitment to exclude the option to secede from Sri Lanka and set up a separate state. The LTTE is not prepared to give any such assurance. The LTTE has announced earlier, it will not discuss issues related to final settlement before the ISGA is set up and is seen to have worked satisfactorily for some years.

Anton Balasingham has rejected the interpretation given by the government, the donor community and opposition parties to the Oslo 'Declaration' in his latest book 'War and Peace'. He has stressed that the LTTE has not abandoned the right of external self-determination. He has said the LTTE's decision to explore federalism on the principle of internal self-determination does not entail an unconditional abandonment of the Tamils' right to external self-determination and secession. He has pointed out that this stand is consistent with the LTTE leader's statement in his 2002 Heroes' Day speech wherein he said, if the Tigers' demand for self-rule under the principle of internal self-determination is blocked or denied, the Tamils would be left with "no alternative other than to secede and form an independent state." This shows the decision of the LTTE leader "to operate within the over-all framework of the right to self-determination, with its internal and external aspects". According to pro-LTTE newspapers, talks on a final solution as in the past are simply a ruse to take the wind from the sails of the Tamil struggle. If the talks start on the basis of a final settlement within a federal structure, the political bargaining power of the Tigers would be compromised. A Tamil columnist recently expressed the view that the LTTE team had compromised the political legacy of the Tamil struggle by aimlessly drifting along with the agenda set by the GOSL and foreign third parties. The LTTE's position at the talks should have firmly been based on the Vaddukkoddai Resolution of 1976, the mandate for a separate state at the 1977 general elections and the Thimpu Principles of

1985. The Sri Lankan government and its international supporters were trying to roll back the political legacy of the Tamil cause, debilitating thereby the bargaining power of the Tamils, says the columnist.

According to him, the LTTE leader realised this blunder and personally intervened "to make a radical course correction and the set of ISGA proposals with its long preamble embodies the gist of the course correction." It is recalled the breakaway leader Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan alias Karuna, who was a member of the LTTE's negotiating team at the Peace Talks revealed earlier his former leader's angry reaction to the outcome of the Oslo round castigating the team for agreeing to consider a federal solution.

The Oslo 'Declaration' controversy intensified when the Second Secretary of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Colombo Tom Knappskog contacted by the Sunday Observer, said that the 'Oslo Declaration' was a statement issued by the Norwegian government in their capacity as the facilitator to the peace process after extensive discussion with the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. It was a press statement issued by the Norwegian government and "does not explicitly state that the LTTE would give up all claims of an independent state. It was only a way to explore a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka".

It is significant that Norway came out with their clarification only after Cabinet Spokesman and Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera at his Cabinet press briefing on October 28 told newsmen the LTTE had accepted the Oslo 'Declaration' with the Norwegian facilitators and the international community, dismissing the statements claimed to be made by Balasingham as only certain excerpts taken from his book. One can understand the charge of dubious conduct being levelled against both or either of the two hostile parties but to include the facilitator too in the same category shows the peculiar nature of this peace process.

Former Minister Prof. G. L. Peiris who was the head of the government's negotiating team issued a statement on November 1 explaining the understanding reached in Oslo in the backdrop of the discussions that took place there. According to him the framework for a political settlement of the N-E conflict was contained in both the Oslo Declaration (made at the meeting of international donor countries and institutions which was also attended by the GOSL and the LTTEon 25 November 2002) and the Oslo Communiqué (co-signed by G L Peiris on behalf of the GOSL and Anton Balasingham on behalf of the LTTE issued on 5 December 2002) after the third round of talks. In the former it was in the statement: "A lasting peace must be built upon renunciation of violence and respect for the principles of human rights, democracy, rule of law, and recognition of the rights of minorities, and must address the needs of all communities all over Sri Lanka, in order to combat poverty and foster ethnic harmony."

The Oslo Communiqué is a statement by the Royal Norwegian Government issued on 5th December 2002, at the end of the third session of Peace Talks and signed by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Norway as well as by the leaders of the two delegations, namely, Prof. G. L. Peiris and Anton Balasingham. Prof. G.L. Peiris has cited paragraph 3 which states: "Responding to a proposal by the leadership of the LTTE, the parties agreed to explore a solution founded on the principles of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka. The parties acknowledged that the solution has to be acceptable to all communities" to assert his contention that the LTTE committed itself Oslo to a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka and thereby suggesting that the LTTE is now seeking to retreat from that commitment.

Tokyo declaration

The Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka was held last year (June 9-10) 6 months after the Oslo round of Peace Talks. Norway was one of the co-chairs of the Conference along with Japan, the United States and the European Union (Presidency and Commission). Paragraph 15 of the Tokyo Declaration issued on 10th June 2003 states: "Donors remind the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE of the importance for both parties to make their utmost efforts to further promote the peace process founded upon the principles reflected in the Oslo Declaration." Paragraph 9 contains the statement: "The Conference commends both parties for their commitment to a lasting and negotiated peace based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka."

Furthermore, paragraph 18 states: "Assistance by the donor community must be closely linked to substantial and parallel progress in the peace process towards fulfillment of the objectives agreed by the parties in Oslo." If there was no Oslo Declaration as claimed now by Norway, why was the Tokyo Conference not informed? Why Norway failed to tell the Conference not to refer to the Oslo objectives, as there was none other than "a way to explore a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka"? The entire episode seems stranger than fiction!

Exploiting hostile conditions

The current perception amongst the LTTE supporters is that the condition imposed by the donors has been to pressure the Sri Lankan government to negotiate with the LTTE. It is the GoSL that is in dire need of foreign aid for financing development projects. Ironically, the financial and economic problems and the dispute between the political parties in the south are helpful to the LTTE's stance. Despite the call by the two Mahanayake Theras of Malwatte and Asigiriya chapters and other concerned leaders urging the main rival political parties in the South to eschew party politics and make a joint effort to resolve the national issue, there is no southern consensus even on the approach to a final settlement. This has been an asset to the LTTE and it has been exploiting such problems to advance its own approach to conflict resolution.

The LTTE finds the UNP to be a close ally as it too is against changing the present constitution, particularly at a time when the Presidential election is not far away. The UNP had blocked all attempts to amend the present constitution made by President Chandrika Kumaratunga since 1994. The meetings of the Parliamentary Select Committee dragged on for three years without reaching a comprehensive agreement because of UNP's indifference.

The LTTE has the skill to use any divisive situation that evolved as a result of discriminatory policies and practices of past governments to its advantage. It has a vested interest in sustaining the conditions that led to the emergence of the ethnic conflict to press for separation. Moves by governments in Colombo to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people have been resisted successfully. The governments too by failing to take meaningful steps have helped the LTTE to perpetuate the suspicion and ill feeling of the Tamil people towards the State.

The international community

The international community has taken a simplistic view of the conflict in Sri Lanka based probably on the assumption that the basic conditions exist to settle the conflict by the usual 'give and take' method. It continues to believe linking foreign aid to progress in the peace front will compel the parties to resume

the suspended peace talks. This has had no effect because the LTTE's interest right now is not on the reconstruction and development of the war-affected region at the expense of being trapped into accepting a watered-down administrative arrangement for the North-East region. Moreover, unlike the government it does not depend on the assistance of foreign governments for sustaining its military strength and maintaining its forces.

Yasushi Akashi, the special peace envoy of the Japanese government, after a meeting with S.P. Thamilselvan in Kilinochchi despite being told of LTTE's unchamged stand on the ISGA was optimistic about the resumption of the Peace Talks. Back in Colombo he announced that the efforts of Norway and his government would bare fruit in bringing the government and the LTTE to negotiations once again. The Norwegian embassy in Colombo in a statement issued prior to the visit of Foreign Minister Jan Petersen and the two Norwegian peace envoys, Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen and Special Advisor Erik Solheim to Sri Lanka on November 10 said the Minister would hold talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran on the future of the peace process. The Minister in a previsit e-mail pres statement sent to the embassy said: "based on signals received from the parties over recent weeks, I do not have high expectations." This is the first time Norway has expressed pessimism about the success of the peace process. Like the GoSL, Norway has in the past always been sounding a promising note for understandable reasons, despite the many setbacks and lack of progress in the peace process.

The LTTE is apprehensive of direct foreign involvement in the resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka for it knows that the international community, particularly taking account of New Delhi's views on the matter, is unlikely to endorse a solution that is essentially secessionist. This is very clear from the statement issued by Anton Balasingham in response to the clarification provided by Prof. G. L. Peiris on the Oslo Declaration/Statement. Balasingham in his statement said that donor governments could only support the peace process and encourage the protagonists to seek a negotiated political settlement but should not stipulate parameters for a political solution adding, "The Sri Lanka Government, with the active collusion of its international tactical allies, the donor governments, have formulated several resolutions in the form of a Declaration to super-impose its own set of ideas on the LTTE. We have already rejected the Tokyo declaration as an unwarranted intervention by extra-territorial forces in the peace process." In refuting Prof. Peiris's interpretation, Mr Balasingham said, "The position advanced by the UNP leaders that a framework for a political solution had emerged based on these three documents (i.e. so called Oslo declaration, the Oslo statement and the Tokyo declaration) is untenable and unacceptable. A solution to the ethnic conflict cannot be pre-determined by the resolutions or declarations of donor conferences, but has to be negotiated by the parties in conflict, without the constraints of external forces."

It seems therefore that what has been touted all these months since December 2002 that the so-called Oslo declaration constituted a major breakthrough in the talks between the previous Government led by Ranil Wickremasinghe and the LTTE in that the parties had agreed to seek solution on a federal basis has turned out to be nothing but a bad dream. The prospect is that, of the many conflicts in the world, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is likely to remain another insoluble one of our time with dire consequences for the people and the country. ❑

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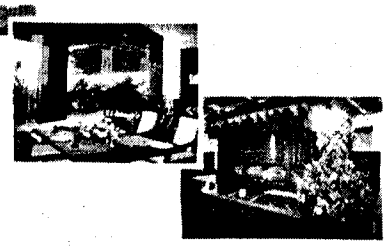

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The disputed Oslo Declaration

Bala's bombshell

Even as diplomatic efforts were being intensified to break out of the stalemate in the peace process, a statement attributed to LTTE's chief negotiator and political advisor Mr Anton Balasingham to the effect that the Tamil Tigers had not given up their demand for a separate state came as a shock for many. Mr Balasingham reportedly said that a joint statement issued after a round of talks with the Colombo government in December 2002 had been misunderstood and misinterpreted so as to suggest that the Tigers had abandoned the right to secede. He said, "The Liberation Tigers' decision to explore federalism ... does not entail an unconditional abandonment of the Tamils' right to external self-determination and secession." Balasingham's remarks, taken from his new new book "War and Peace" were reproduced on the Tamilnet website.

However, the international community had perceived and projected the third round of talks in Oslo in December 2002 as a breakthrough, with the Tigers' agreeing to a federal solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The joint statement issued on 5 December 2002 at the end of the third round of talks stated that "the parties agreed to explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka.".

The statement, which came to be known as the "Oslo Declaration", was interpreted by diplomats as a sign that the Tigers were firmly committed to working towards a federal state and there would be no return to war.

However, Balasingham said,."I feel it necessary to clarify our position on this controversial issue." "It must be stated that there was not any specific proclamation titled the 'Oslo Declaration' "The decision to explore federalism was included in the record of decisions at the Oslo talks and signed by the chief negotiators of both delegations and the head of the Norwegian facilitating team." He went on to say that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) still operated within the "overall framework of the right to self-determination, with its internal and external aspects", and if their demand for regional self-rule was rejected, he added, they would have no alternative but to secede and form an independent state.

Mr Balasingham in a statement published in the TamilNet on 3 November said, "The donor conferences held in Oslo on 25 November 2002 and in Tokyo on 10 June 2003 and the resolutions adopted at these meetings cannot bind our liberation organisation to a particular framework of a final political settlement."

Commenting on the statement issued by Professor GL Peiris on behalf of the United National Party (UNP) clarifying documents released after donor meetings at Oslo and Tokyo, Mr Balasingham emphasised that donor governments could only support the peace process and encourage the protagonists to seek a negotiated political settlement but should not stipulate parameters for a political solution.

He pointed out that the LTTE boycotted the Tokyo Donor Conference, and the Declaration enunciated at the meeting had no binding obligations on the organisation. "The Sri Lanka government, with the active collusion of its international tactical allies, the donor governments, have formulated several resolutions in the form of a Declaration to super-impose its own set of ideas and propositions on the LTTE. We have already rejected the Tokyo Declaration as an unwarranted intervention by extra-territorial forces in the peace process. In an official statement issued on 23 June 2003, the LTTE leadership severely censored the government of Ranil Wickremesinghe for seeking refuge in the so-called 'international safety net' to resolve the political and economic crisis faced by the country, thereby shifting the peace process from third party facilitation to the realm of international arbitration," Mr Balasingham said.

He added that the communiqué isssued in Oslo stated that both parties agreed to explore the feasibility of finding a political solution based on federal systems of governance founded on the principle of internal self-determination. The Declaration issued after the Oslo Donor Conference on 25 November 2002 only expressed strong support for the peace process and urged both parties to make further 'expeditious and systematic efforts, without recourse to violence to resolve the hardcore issues.'

"The position advanced by the UNP leaders that a framework for a political solution had emerged based on these three documents stated above, is untenable and unacceptable. A solution to the ethnic conflict cannot be pre-determined by the resolutions or declarations of donor conferences, but has to be negotiated by the parties in conflict, without the constraints of external forces," Mr Balasingham observed.

UNP position on the "Oslo Declaration"

From the explicit statements contained in the Oslo Declaration, the Oslo Communique and the Tokyo Declaration it was evident that there was clear aggeement between the Government and LTTE to explore a federal solution as the basis of a political solution for the ethnic conlfict, UNP MP Prof. G. L. Peiris said.

In a statement issued to media on 1 November the UNP said, "The basic structure of the solution had been identified, and the details were to be worked out in the discussions which were to follow. For the first time, therefore, a framework had emerged for the pursuit of a just and viable political solution as an alternative to war."

The full text of the UNP statement said:

The framework for a political settlement of the North East conflict is contained in three documents - the Oslo Declaration, the Oslo Communique and the Tokyo Declaration.

1. The Oslo Declaration in support of the Peace Process in Sri Lanka - This Conference was held in Oslo on 25th November 2002. Representatives from the Asia-Pacific region, North America and Europe participated at this Conference together with the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE.

The Declaration states: "A lasting peace must be built upon renunciation of violence and respect for the principles of human rights, democracy, rule of law, and recognition of the rights of minorities, and must address the needs of all com-

munities all over Sri Lanka, in order to combat poverty and foster ethnic harmony."

2. The Oslo Communique - This is a statement by the Royal Norwegian Government issued in Oslo on 5th December 2002, at the end of the third session of Peace Talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE.

Paragraph 3 states: "Responding to a proposal by the leadership of the LTTE, the parties agreed to explore a solution founded on the principles of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka. The parties acknowledged that the solution has to be acceptable to all communities."

3. The Tokyo Declaration on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka issued on 10th June 2003, where 51 countries and 22 international organisations participated. This included the Government of Sri Lanka.

The Declaration among others stated the following:

i "The Conference commends both parties for their commitment to a lasting and negotiated peace based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka." (Paragraph 9).

ii "The international community remains committed to supporting humanitarian relief and human rights protection, and takes the opportunity to encourage the parties to reach agreement on an innovative administrative structure for the reconstruction and development of the North and East." (Paragraph 13).

iii "The Conference also urges the parties to move expeditiously to a lasting and equitable political settlement". (Paragraph 16).

iv "Participation of a Muslim delegation as agreed in the declaration of the fourth session of peace talks in Thailand. (Paragraph 18 (c)); - "Effective inclusion of gender equity and equality in the peace building..." (Paragraph 18(g)).

v "Agreement by the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE on a phased, balanced, and verifiable de-escalation, demilitarization, and normalisation process at an appropriate time in the context of arriving at a political settlement." (Paragraph 19 (j)).

It is evident from the explicit statements contained in these documents that there was, indeed, clear agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to explore a federal solution as the basis of a political resolution of the ethnic conflict. This is the effect of the Oslo Communique issued by the Royal Norwegian Government on 5th December 2002 and signed by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Norway as well as by the leaders of the two delegations.

The basic structure of the solution had been identified, and the details were to be worked out in the discussions which were to follow. For the first time, therefore, a framework had emerged for the pursuit of a just and viable political solution as an alternative to war.

The public is well aware that the JVP is attempting to raise a non-issue as a means of distracting attention from burning issues relating to the cost of living, which is the central problem in the country today.

Helgessen on
the 'Oslo Declaration'

Oslo, Nov11: Reacting to Anton Balasingham's interpretation and the dispute that followed on the issue of the "Oslo Declaration", Vidar Helgesen, Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister, who led the country's facilitation team in all rounds of talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, said the Oslo Statement was prepared from the minutes maintained by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry officials during the October 2002 Oslo talks between the Sri Lanka government, the LTTE and the Norwegian government. He said the LTTE had agreed to give up the separatist demand and to explore a federal set up and "that was the most significant breakthrough".

In an interview with the Norwegian daily Dagsavisen before his departure with Foreign Minister Jan Pertesen for talks in Sri Lanka, Helgesen is quoted as saying, "The statement is a compiled text, formulated by the Norwegian government and part of the minute book from the negotiations. What it says in the statement reflects what emerged during the meeting." "What is new in the Oslo Declaration is that the LTTE is said to be willing to negotiate about a federal solution in a united Sri Lanka. The content of the federal solution will decide whether LTTE believes it is good enough."

Helgesen believed that this was the most significant development between the parties. "That was a breakthrough. However, it does not involve that the LTTE abolished their right of armed fight if the political negotiations do not lead anywhere."

"It is still important that the foreign minister at regular intervals has a dialogue with the parties so that they can evaluate whether they should not carry out a change of tactics," he said. "The main problem now is that there is a weakened faith in the possibilities of taking the peace process forward. In addition several breaches of the cease-fire agreement have taken place, especially from the Tamil Tigers' side, something which has resulted in strong international reactions," Helgesen is reported to have said.

Asked about the LTTE's willingness to resume talks which the militants had unilaterally broken off in April last year, Helgesen is reported to have said, "If the LTTE gets an acceptable agenda they will come for alks. Their demand is that the government must be willing to negotiate on their proposal on interim-administration for the north and east."

UNP leaders
taken for a ride

The Secretary of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka Kamal Nissanka in a news release states that to consider the Interim Self Government Authority (ISGA) proposals as basis for future discussions it needs a mandate from the people of the two provinces.

It further states: "The Liberal Party of Sri Lanka is closely watching some of the recent statements made by those who were in the forefront of peace negotiations in recent past. Anton Balasingham's recent revelation about the Oslo communique and some of its contents is none other than spitting on the face of the UNP negotiators (and its top rank) and the liberals advise that any party that will expect to participate in any future negotiations on behalf of the Sri Lankan government should not come up with public comments without clarifying exact positions on various stands.

Though we do not agree with Balasingham's agenda we must thank him for revealing his true stand and colour on the so-called Oslo communique and liberals feel that the LTTE and its Norwegian ally had taken the UNP for a ride at Oslo. Liberals further state that the aim of the Norwegian from the inception of the process was to give the widest possible international acceptance to the LTTE. However, looking at recent events we feel that the Norwegian Foreign Ministry has completely failed at pressurising the Liberal government of Denmark

as all the parties in the coalition had a clear stand to call a spade a spade. (In Denmark, Venstre-Liberal Party of Anders Fogh Rasmussens, the prime minister of Denmark is the leading party of the minority coalition and the Venstre-Liberal Party is also a leading member of the Liberal International of which the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka is also a member. Further it has some members in the Liberal Group of the European Parliament).

Yet, the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka requests the UNP and the SLFP to forget the Oslo 'explorations' as sighted in the Oslo communique and arrive at a consensus to draft a true federal constitution with adequate safeguards to the northern and eastern provinces in the name of democratic Tamil opinion, upholding all the democratic norms prevailing in mature democracies and give it a widest international propaganda to defeat the separatist agenda of the militant Tamil opinion envisaged by the one party autocratic rule of the Interim Self Government Authority (ISGA) proposal.

Though the Norwegian ally with an LTTE team attempted recently to canvass the ISGA in some of the EU countries for international legitimacy, we people living in the nine provinces in Sri Lanka even do not know the names of the framers of this ISGA document (I think even the Ranil-GL clique of the UNP who does lip service to the ISGA does not know?). The LTTE's attempt to seek European legitimacy for its proposals is a joke, as the ISGA needs to first seek its legitimacy from the people of north and east if possible by way of a referendum. The LTTE has no right to impose a one party rule on the people of north and east without a much-needed mandate from the very people that they hope to govern. If any Sri Lankan government with the concurrence of some illogical European community governments accepts ISGA on a platter, it must realise that the southern provinces of Sri Lanka would be the political asylum of the many Tamil democrats and South Indian criminals would come and do summersaults in the northern and eastern provinces."

If the ISGA is to be taken as a base for future discussions firstly it must be presented to the people of the northern and eastern provinces for open debate and discussions within a democratic atmosphere and finally set before the people for approval. Liberals all over the world will never support any constitutional scheme that would hinder the individual rights of each person in a given nation or community.

NSSP on the right to secession

"Tamils have the right to demand a separate State until their aspirations are adequately met, constitutionally entrenched and implemented. If this were done the demand would cease to be valid. It is well known that the Provincial Council system failed, as did all previous attempts at a solution to the Tamil national question since the 1950s," said Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), a pro-peace marxist party, in a media release issued on November 6 in Colombo.

"Marxists recognize the right to self-determination as a most desirable device for unifying different nationalities as a mechanism to provide adequate regional autonomy. The right to secede is acceptable as a last option," said the media release.

(continued on next page)

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FOCUS ON RIGHTS

Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the LTTE

By abducting children or threatening their families, the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have recruited thousands of child soldiers in Sri Lanka since active fighting ended in 2002, the New York-based international human rights organisation, **Human Rights Watch** said in a 80-page report released on 11 November 2004.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, or Tamil Tigers) use intimidation and threats to pressure Tamil families in the north and east of Sri Lanka to provide sons and daughters for military service. When families refuse, their children are sometimes abducted from their homes at night or forcibly recruited while walking to school. Parents who resist the recruitment of their children face retribution from the Tamil Tigers, including violence or detention.

"The ceasefire has brought an end to the fighting, but not to the Tamil Tigers' use of children as soldiers," said Jo Becker, children's rights advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, and a co-author of the report. "Many Tamil families who expected a 'peace dividend' now expect an unwelcome visit from armed Tamil Tiger recruiters." The 80-page report, "Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka," includes firsthand testimonies from dozens of children from northeastern Sri Lanka who have been recruited by the Tamil Tigers since the ceasefire came into effect. Children described rigorous and sometimes brutal military training, including training with heavy weapons, bombs and landmines. Children who try to escape are typically beaten in front of their entire unit as a warning to others.

The Tamil Tigers have recruited at least 3,516 children since the start of the February 2002 ceasefire with the government, according to cases documented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The agency states that this figure represents only a portion of the total number of children recruited.

Human Rights Watch also documented targeted re-recruitment drives of children released from a breakaway LTTE faction earlier this year. In March, the LTTE's Eastern commander, Colonel Karuna, broke away from the main LTTE forces loyal to Vellupillai Prabhakaran, based in the northern region known as the Vanni. In April, Prabhakaran's forces, known as the Vanni LTTE, attacked and defeated Karuna's Eastern forces, which quickly disbanded. About 2,000 child soldiers fled Karuna's forces or were encouraged by their commanders to leave. Some died in the fighting.

The Vanni LTTE quickly began an intensive campaign to re-recruit Karuna's former forces, including children. The Vanni forces have gone from house to house, organized village meetings, sent children letters and made announcements from motorized vehicles to demand that the former child soldiers return. They have taken many children by force. "They took away my younger brother the other day. He was coming home from the market and he was taken away," said Vanji, who was recruited by the LTTE in 1997 at age 16. "They didn't release him, and they threatened to shoot if I reported his abduction. They also told me at the same time that I had to re-join."

International law prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 18 by non-state armed groups, and all participation of children in active hostilities. The recruitment of children under the age of 15 is now considered a war crime.

The LTTE denies recruiting children and claims that any children in its forces have joined because of poverty, lack of educational opportunities, or the loss of their parents and lack of alternative care. Although some children do join because of socioeconomic factors or because they want to fight for an independent Tamil state, such "voluntary" recruitment is also a violation of international law.

In June 2003, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government agreed to a formal Action Plan on Children Affected by War. Under the Action Plan, the Tamil Tigers agreed to end their recruitment of children and to release children from their forces, either directly to the children's families or to new transit centers that were constructed specifically for this purpose.

Since the Action Plan was signed, UNICEF figures show that the LTTE has recruited more than twice as many children as it has released. A transit center opened in October 2003 received a total of only 172 children in its first year of operation. Although the center has capacity for 100 children, it has never held more than 49, and for a six-week period in mid-2004, was completely empty. The other two centers never opened because of the low number of children released.

"Time and again, the Tamil Tigers have pledged to end their use of child soldiers, but each time they've broken those promises," said Becker. "It's time for the Tamil Tigers to live up to their legal responsibilities and stop recruiting children."

Summary

My parents refused to give me to the LTTE so about fifteen of them came to my house—it was both men and women, in uniforms, with rifles, and guns in holsters.... I was fast asleep when they came to get me at one in the morning.... These people dragged me out of the house. My father shouted at them, saying, "What is going on?", but some of the LTTE soldiers took my father away towards the woods and beat

(continued from page22)

NSSP said that what was needed, first and foremost, in the current context was a resumption of talks between the Govt. of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE.

The NSSP said that although "the overwhelming expectation of the North East Tamils who looked forward for rehabilitation and reconstruction, was for an Interim administration to deliver their immediate needs," the LTTE did not push for it in the early round of talks because of "reservations expressed on behalf of the GoSL and of the Muslims."

But the alternative instrument devised at the talks, the Sub-committee for Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN), woefully failed to deliver the goods, and there was widespread disillusionment among the war devastated North East Tamils that the peace dividend did not reach them. The North East remained, and in fact still largely remains, the "blasted landscape," NSSP said.

"Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga stated recently that she is prepared to start talks with the LTTE, based on the ISGA proposals, provided LTTE leader Pirapaharan officially declares that he is prepared for a solution within the parameters of what came to be known as the Oslo Declaration which in fact is the Statement dated 5.12.02 by the Norwegian Govt, signifying agreement by parties concerned to "explore a political solution founded on internal self-determination in the areas of historical habitation of Tamil speaking people, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka acceptable to all communities".

"Obviously then both the Govt. of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE have subscribed to this position, which has been supplemented by the Tokyo Declaration as clarified by the then Govt's Chief Negotiator, Prof.G.L. Peiris, M.P," NSSP's media release said.

him.... They also pushed my mother onto the ground when she tried to stop them. -girl recruited by the LTTE in 2003 at age sixteen

They took away my younger brother the other day. He was coming home from the market and he was taken away. I went and begged them, saying, "I gave you years of my life and I gave you my health. Please let me have my brother back—he is the only one I have who takes care of me, helps me to go to the toilet, helps me get into bed." They didn't release him, and they threatened to shoot if I reported his abduction to any NGOs. They also told me at the same time that I had to re-join. Is this how they thank me for all the time I gave them? Why are they doing this to me?

- girl who was recruited by the LTTE at age sixteen and severely disabled in combat

For Tamil families in the North and East of Sri Lanka, the February 2002 cease-fire that has brought an end to the fighting between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has brought little relief from one of the worst aspects of the twenty-year conflict: the LTTE's recruitment and use of children as soldiers. Despite an end to active hostilities and repeated pledges by the LTTE leadership to end its recruitment of children, the practice has continued not only in LTTE controlled areas, but now reaches into government areas in the North and East where the LTTE previously had little access. This report focuses on continued LTTE recruitment of children during the cease-fire period, including re-recruitment of children released from the LTTE's eastern faction in 2004.

Tamil children are vulnerable to recruitment beginning at the age of eleven or twelve. The LTTE routinely visits Tamil homes to inform parents that they must provide a child for the "movement." Families that resist are harassed and threatened. Parents are told that their child may be taken by force if they do not comply, that other children in the household or the parents will be taken in their stead, or that the family will be forced to leave their home. The LTTE makes good on these threats: children are frequently abducted from their homes at night, or picked up by LTTE cadres while walking to school or attending a temple festival. Parents who resist the abduction of their children face violent LTTE retribution.

Once recruited, most children are allowed no contact with their families. The LTTE subjects them to rigorous and sometimes brutal training. They learn to handle weapons, including landmines and bombs, and are taught military tactics. Children who make mistakes are frequently beaten. The LTTE harshly punishes soldiers who attempt to escape. Children who try to run away are typically beaten in front of their entire unit, a public punishment that serves to dissuade other children who might be tempted to run away.

The Norwegian government-brokered cease-fire between the government and the LTTE in February 2002 brought a very welcome end to active hostilities that have cost more than 60,000 lives over twenty years. However, the cease-fire may have exacerbated the LTTE's recruitment of child soldiers from government-controlled areas. By the terms of the cease-fire, unarmed LTTE cadres may lawfully enter government controlled areas, known as "cleared" areas. In reality the LTTE dominates the administration and security of the major towns in the North and East, including Jaffna and Batticaloa. The LTTE has used this control to extend their recruitment of children to these Tamil population centres.

Throughout the cease-fire, the LTTE has sought new recruits for its forces. The LTTE may be trying to strengthen its hand during the peace talks, prepare for its control of the North and East in the event of a final peace agreement, or be militarily prepared in the event the peace talks collapse—or for all of these reasons. Sri Lankan government sources and local nongovernmental organizations believe that the LTTE has recruited several thousand new cadres during this period, though hard figures are elusive.

As of October 31, 2004, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had documented 3,516 new cases of underage recruitment since the signing of the cease-fire agreement (including the re-recruitment of formerly released child soldiers noted below). The LTTE formally released only 1,206 children during this time. Of the cases registered by UNICEF, 1,395 were outstanding as of November 2004. UNICEF notes that the number of cases it registers represent only a portion of the total number of children recruited, as some families may be unaware of the possibility of registering, may be afraid to do so, or may have difficulty reaching a UNICEF office. Of the children who have been released or returned from the LTTE, only about 25 percent were previously listed in the UNICEF database. This suggests that the total number of children remaining with the LTTE may be as much as four times higher than the 1,395 figure suggests.

In March 2004, the commander of LTTE forces in the East, V. Muralitharan, popularly known as Col. Karuna, split off from the main LTTE forces loyal to supreme leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran, based in the North, a region known as the Vanni. In April 2004, the Vanni LTTE attacked and defeated Karuna's eastern forces, which quickly disbanded. Some 2,000 child soldiers under Karuna fled or were encouraged by their commanders to return to their families.

The children's return home, primarily to Batticaloa district, only marked the beginning of a new ordeal. Within a few weeks, the LTTE began an intensive campaign to re-recruit Karuna's former cadres, including child soldiers. Vanni LTTE members, often armed and in uniform, went from village to village, house to house, insisting that the former soldiers report back to the LTTE. The LTTE organized village meetings, use motorized three-wheeled vehicles to make announcements, and sent letters to families, demanding their return.

The LTTE has re-recruited many of the returned children, often by force. Parents who have resisted their children's being taken away a second time by the LTTE have been intimidated and sometimes beaten. The remaining children and their families live in fear. The families are afraid to allow their children to return to school, worried that the LTTE will abduct them as they walk between school and their home. Some children refuse to leave their homes at all. Others go to live with relatives or even leave the country to seek jobs in the Middle East. Because there is a general perception that the LTTE does not recruit from among married persons, some boys and girls have married believing that it will provide a measure of protection against recruitment. Girls feel particularly vulnerable—they can instantly be identified as former cadres by the short haircuts that the LTTE gives its recruits.

Recruitment and Use of Children Before the Cease-fire

The LTTE has recruited and used children as soldiers throughout the two-decade-long civil war in Sri Lanka, and especially since October 1987 when the LTTE attacked and eventually forced the departure of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force from the northern Jaffna peninsula.[2]

LTTE recruitment of children has over the years been fuelled by several factors. First, a sophisticated LTTE propaganda machine regularly exposed Tamil children throughout the North and East to special events honouring LTTE heroes, parades of LTTE cadres, public displays of war paraphernalia, and speeches and videos, particularly in the schools. Families of LTTE heroes were afforded special respect, and children were drawn to the status and glamour of serving as cadres.

Second, children who witnessed or suffered abuses by Sri Lankan security forces often felt driven to join the LTTE. Government abuses prior to the cease-fire included unlawful detention, interrogation, torture, execution, enforced disappearances, and rape. A 1993 study of adolescents in Vaddukoddai in the North found that one quarter of the children studied had witnessed violence personally.[3] In response, many children joined the LTTE, seeking to protect their families or to avenge real or perceived abuses.

Third, deprivation, including poverty and lack of vocational and educational opportunities often fueled recruitment, particularly among Tamils of the eastern districts, where families were typically poorer and considered of lower status than Tamils in the

North. Enlisting in the LTTE was perceived as a positive alternative to the other options children saw around them.

Finally, coercion and force brought many children into the LTTE. Particularly in the East, the LTTE has pressured Tamil families to provide a son or daughter for "the cause." If a family resisted, they were often subject to threats and harassment. In many cases, a child was eventually taken by force.

Under international law, recruitment of children to be soldiers is not only unlawful if the children are forcibly recruited. The LTTE is also violating international law by accepting into its ranks children who join "voluntarily."

Children were initially recruited into what was known as the "Baby Brigade," but were later integrated into other units. An elite "Leopard Brigade" (*Siruthai puligal*) was formed of children drawn from LTTE-run orphanages and was considered one of the LTTE's fiercest fighting units.

UNICEF reports that more than 40 percent of children recruited by the LTTE are girls.[4] The LTTE claims that the recruitment of girls and women is a way of "assisting women's liberation and counteracting the oppressive traditionalism of the present system."[5] Female soldiers within the LTTE are known as "Birds of Freedom." Unlike many other conflict situations where girls are recruited, sexual abuse of girls in the LTTE is rare, and relationships between the sexes are generally prohibited.

Prior to the cease-fire, the LTTE regularly deployed both boys and girls in combat.[6] A major LTTE military operation against the Elephant Pass military complex in 1991 reportedly used waves of children drawn from the Baby Brigade and resulted in an estimated 550 LTTE deaths, mostly children.[7] Assessments of LTTE soldiers killed in combat during the 1990's found that between 40 and 60 percent of the dead fighters were children under the age of eighteen.[8] A case study conducted for a major United Nations (U.N.) study on the impact of war on children found that children were reportedly used for "massed frontal attacks" in major battles, and that children between the ages of twelve and fourteen were used to massacre women and children in remote rural villages. The study cited reports indicating the use of children as young as ten as assassins.[9]

The LTTE gives cyanide capsules and grenades to its soldiers, including children, with instructions to take the capsule or blow themselves up rather than allow themselves to be captured by the Sri Lankan Army.[10]

The LTTE was among the first armed opposition groups to use its cadres, including children, to carry out suicide bomb attacks. Since the 1980's, the LTTE has conducted some 200 such suicide bombings.[11] Female soldiers, girls among them, were used for numerous such attacks, in part because they were less likely to undergo rigorous searches at government checkpoints.

LTTE Commitments

Action Plan for Children

Since 1998, the LTTE has made repeated public promises to senior U.N. officials to end its recruitment and use of children. In 2003, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government formally agreed on an Action Plan for Children Affected by War (Action Plan) that included a pledge by the LTTE to end all recruitment of children and to release children from its forces, both directly to the children's families as well as to new transit centers that were constructed specifically for this purpose.

As of mid-2004, the Action Plan was the only signed human rights agreement to result from the post-cease-fire peace talks. The Action Plan provided for the establishment of three transit centers to receive children released by the LTTE, and to provide children affected by the conflict in the North and East with vocational training, education, health and nutritional services, psychosocial care, and other programs. The LTTE and the government agreed on the plan in April 2003 and formally signed it in June 2003. UNICEF played a primary role in negotiating the Action Plan, and is the main implementing partner.

Since the Action Plan was signed, UNICEF figures show that more than twice as many children have been recruited as have been released. One transit center opened in October 2003, but received a total of only 172 children in its first year of operation. Although the center has the capacity for one hundred children, it has never held more than forty-nine, and for a six-week period in mid-2004, was completely empty. The two other transit centers were constructed but never opened because of the low number of children released.

Legal Standards

By any measure, the LTTE has failed to meet its commitments to end its recruitment and use of children. The LTTE's continued recruitment of children violates international human rights and humanitarian law (the laws of war) that explicitly prohibits the recruitment of children as soldiers and the participation of children in active hostilities. The nearly-universally ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Sri Lanka is party, and the Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions prohibit any recruitment or use in armed conflict of children under the age of fifteen. This standard is now considered customary international law, and such recruitment is identified as a war crime in the statute for the International Criminal Court.

In the late 1990's, a new international consensus that a minimum age of fifteen was too low for military service resulted in stronger standards. The Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, adopted by the International Labor Organization in 1999, prohibits the forced recruitment of children under the age of eighteen for use in armed conflict as one of the worst forms of child labor. An Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the U.N. in 2000 and ratified by Sri Lanka in the same year, set eighteen as the minimum age for all participation in hostilities, all forced recruitment or conscription, and all recruitment by non-state armed groups.

Note on Methodology

This is Human Rights Watch's fifteenth report on the recruitment and use of child soldiers. We have previously documented this practice in Angola, Burma, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Uganda.

Human Rights Watch conducted research for this report in Sri Lanka in August 2004 and subsequently by telephone and electronic mail from New York and the Hague. Our researchers visited Colombo, Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee, and Kilinochchi. During the course of our investigation, we spoke with thirty-five former child soldiers from the LTTE, who had been recruited between the ages of twelve and seventeen. At the time of our interviews, they ranged in age from fourteen to twenty-one. Most had been recruited between 2001 and 2004 and spent between three weeks and eight years with the LTTE. The average length of time in the LTTE for these children was approximately 2.7 years.

We also conducted over forty other interviews for this report, speaking to parents, human rights activists, representatives of local and international nongovernmental organizations and representatives of UNICEF, the LTTE-dominated Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM). We also spoke with representatives of the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

The names of all children have been changed in this report in order to protect their privacy, and because of the very real threats of re-recruitment and reprisals that

(continued on page 28)

IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

Returning back to Sri Lanka with the help and support of IOM -VOLUNTARY ASSISTED RETURN AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMME -

"I was very happy to be able to return home knowing that I would have the exciting opportunity to set up my own small garment business in Sri Lanka. I had not realized before that there is an Organisation like IOM assisting asylum seekers in this way" This was Mr. A's feeling at returning home after more than four years in the UK. Since than IOM London could help Mr. A to purchase sewing machines, tables and scissors in order for him to begin work in his own shop.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is an independent organization working with migrants worldwide since 1951 and has offices in over 100 countries.

The IOM London office implements the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP), assisting asylum seekers who want to return voluntarily to their home country since 1999. Under this programme IOM can help applicants get travel documentation, arrange flights home, assist at departure and on arrival, and offer reintegration assistance where possible in the home country. The number of people returning under this programme has steadily increased since the programme started in 1999. To date IOM could help over 6000 people from 89 different countries to return home.

An important part of the VARRP is the reintegration fund. Each returnee who applies for the programme is eligible for reintegration assistance. This can be in the form of education, vocational training or help to set up a small business.

The IOM office in Sri Lanka can offer all of the above-mentioned possibilities since 2002. More than 380 people have returned to Sri Lanka and many benefited from Reintegration Assistance.

Upon arrival, Returnees are met at the airport by IOM Sri Lanka staff, which is perceived as a very positive experience by the returnees. As Mr Samarasinghe from IOM Sri Lanka puts it :"Returnees bloom when they see us with the IOM emblem at the airport; they are very happy to see that they are secured with the IOM presence" There are four Reception Centers in Sri Lanka that all offer counseling, Information sharing and orientation programmes. The Reception Centers are located in Colombo, Batticaloa, Jaffna and Kandi and can sometimes offer short-term lodging facilities to returnees for the first days, which the returnee requires in order, find permanent accommodation in Sri Lanka.

IOM London
Free phone:
0800 783 2332
Tel: 0207 233 0001
www.iomlondon.org

Refugee Action
Free phone:
0800 917 2719
London:
0207 654 7700
Manchester:
0161 233 1200
Leeds:
0113 244 5345
Leicester:
0116 261 4846
www.refugee-action.org.uk

NERS
North-East:
0191 200 1109
www.refugee.org.uk

YMCA Glasgow
Glasgow:
0141 557 2355
www.ymcaglasgow.org

Safe Haven Yorkshire
Sheffield:
0114 256 1033

Mr Samarasinghe stated that: "The returnees who have been assisted under the Reintegration Programme are doing well in the society and their living conditions are very good." To achieve this, participants of the Reintegration Assistance Programme have in the past set up stationary, tailoring and welding shops and do not only provide an income for themselves and their families but can sometimes even employ additional people from their local communities.
One returnee who set up a batik shop in Puttalam District is now running a successful business while providing employment for 21 workers.

One sentence the IOM staff in Sri Lanka often hears from returnees is that; "They could have returned earlier if they would have known about the International Organization of Migration and the help it can provide both in the United Kingdom and in Sri Lanka."

This young Gentleman returned to Sri Lanka and wanted to invest and work in the grocery shop of his uncle. The assistance provided by IOM Sri Lanka was used to purchase additional goods and therefore further develop the grocery store. This investment combined with his enthusiasm to earn his own living has proved to be very useful and furthered the success of the enterprise.

This woman returned to Colombo and wished to set up a sewing business. IOM Sri Lanka helped to purchase the necessary equipment, sewing machines and tables so she could start up her own business. Her business is prospering and she is currently employing three people. The sewing business is taking in orders from her local community and the owner hopes to be able to expand even further in the future.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme please contact IOM London – **Free phone: 0800 783 2332** or Tel: 020 7233 0001
Fax: 020 7233 3001, e-mail: varrp@iomlondon.org, webpage: www.iomlondon.org Programme Information is available in Romanian on our webpage.
VARRP 21 Westminster Palace Gardens, Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RR (near St. James Park Tube and Victoria Station)
IOM works in partnership with Refugee Action, YMCA Glasgow, Safe Haven Yorkshire and NERS – these organisations offer information, advice and support to asylum seekers considering return home.

This Programme is co-financed by the European Refugee Fund

(continued from page 25)
they face. Also for security reasons, we do not identify many of the other individuals and organizations interviewed for this report or name the location of some interviews or events.

In this report, the word "child" refers to anyone under the age of eighteen.

Recommendations

To the LTTE:

Immediately stop all recruitment of children, including efforts to re-register or re-recruit child ex-combatants from Karuna's forces; Release all children from LTTE forces and give those recruited before age eighteen the option to leave:

Inform families throughout the North and East of Sri Lanka of the LTTE's commitment not to recruit children under the age of eighteen through public announcements and use of the local media, including the LTTE's own media channels, and ensure that all recruitment materials clearly identify eighteen as the minimum age for recruitment;

Take all appropriate steps to ensure LTTE commanders and other cadres do not recruit children under the age of eighteen into LTTE forces, "voluntarily" or otherwise and provide the international community (through UNICEF) with documentation of disciplinary actions taken against LTTE cadre responsible for such recruitment; Fulfill all commitments agreed under the Action Plan for Children Affected by War; Approve for immediate dissemination the child rights awareness campaign messages submitted to the LTTE by UNICEF in January of 2004;

Allow UNICEF access to all military training camps to assess the age of recruits, and identify children for demobilization; Create a high-level task force to resolve outstanding cases of under-age recruitment; Establish a hotline or rapid response mechanism to act on reports of new recruitment and designate focal points in each district who will be accountable for acting on any complaints;

Publish the status of inquiries into cases raised by UNICEF on a routine basis.

To the Government:

Ensure that an end to child recruitment and immediate demobilization of children from the LTTE are part of any new peace agreement with the LTTE; Take all appropriate measures in areas under its control to protect children from LTTE recruitment, including increasing a government presence near schools, temple festivals and other places where children are likely to be abducted;

Improve relations between the Sri Lankan army and police with the Tamil population, including by increasing the number of Tamil speakers within the security forces and providing language training to non-Tamil speakers;

Grant a formal amnesty to all former child soldiers for their participation in the LTTE; Ensure that all eligible persons (including former child soldiers without discrimination) are issued national identity cards;Waive traditional entry requirements for state-run vocational colleges for former child soldiers in order to encourage their enrolment;

Support the deployment of international human rights monitors under the auspices of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, as envisioned in the Hakone talks;

Ratify the Rome statute for the International Criminal Court.

To the UNICEF:

Set firm benchmarks and deadlines for LTTE compliance with its commitments to end child recruitment and release children from its forces; if the LTTE fails to meet the benchmarks by the specified deadline, suspend operations at the transit centers, including any funds going to the TRO for center operations;

Continue and strengthen efforts to prevent child recruitment, including re-recruitment of former child soldiers;

Strengthen communication and working relationships with local communities and local nongovernmental organizations in order to effectively monitor child recruitment, put in place effective prevention strategies, and better support affected families, including their efforts to resist child recruitment;

Intervene rapidly in cases of child recruitment by raising cases with the LTTE as quickly as possible and accompanying families, when possible, in requesting the return of their children; Publish recruitment and release statistics on a regular basis, together with the status of LTTE responses.

To the ILO

As the lead implementing partner for vocational training programs for former child soldiers, create vocational training opportunities, when appropriate, that utilize former soldiers' non-military training in the LTTE (e.g. medical training).

To the NECOHR:

Issue a public statement condemning child recruitment and develop with UNICEF and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka complementary strategies to prevent the recruitment of children and to secure the release of children from the LTTE.

To the Govt of Norway:

As a facilitator of the peace process, ensure that an end to child recruitment and immediate demobilization of children in the LTTE are part of any new peace agreement. Negotiate a clear understanding with the parties that "political work" conducted under the cease-fire agreement may not include any form of child recruitment.

To the SLMM:

Actively and consistently monitor and report on child recruitment, in accordance with the cease-fire agreement's prohibition on intimidation, abduction, extortion, and harassment of the civilian population;

Regularly and consistently raise issues of child recruitment with the LTTE, including specific cases;

Establish a human rights unit, dedicated to systematically monitoring the violations of international law stipulated in the cease-fire agreement and staff it with trained human rights monitors.

To Donor Countries:

Create a donor task force for close liaison with UNICEF and other local actors and to make urgent interventions with the LTTE in cases of new recruitment;

Provide financial and logistical support for the deployment of international human rights monitors in support of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka as envisioned in the Hakone talks;

Consider the appropriateness of channelling economic assistance through agencies, such as the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, that are linked to the LTTE;

Use economic leverage to pressure the LTTE to put an end to all child recruitment by the LTTE and to promote the release of all children currently in the LTTE's ranks.

To the Tamil Diaspora:

Express public opposition to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict by the LTTE and other serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Sri Lanka.

Ensure that funds provided to organizations in Sri Lanka do not directly or indirectly benefit the LTTE so long as it recruits and uses child soldiers or otherwise commits serious rights violations;

To Governments of Countries with Tamil Diaspora:

Clearly communicate condemnation of the LTTE's child recruitment practices to members of the Tamil diaspora through both the Tamil and mainstream media and meetings with leaders of the Tamil diaspora.

To the UN Security Council:

In accordance with Security Council Resolution 1539 on children and armed conflict (April 22, 2004), paragraph 6, adopt targeted measures to address the LTTE's failure to end child recruitment. Such measures could include the imposition of travel restrictions on leaders and their exclusion from any governance structures and amnesty provisions, a ban on the supply of small arms, a ban on military assistance, and restriction on the flow of financial resources;

Local Colombo missions of the Security Council should meet with the LTTE to insist on progress in the release of children, in accordance with Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.

To All UN Member States:

In accordance with Security Council resolution 1379 on children and armed conflict (November 20, 2001), paragraph 9, use all legal, political, diplomatic, financial, and material measures to ensure respect for international norms for the protection of children by the parties to the conflict. In particular, states should unequivocally condemn the LTTE's continued recruitment and use of child soldiers and withhold any financial, political, or military support to the LTTE until it ends all child recruitment and releases all children currently in its ranks. ❑

PEOPLE & POLITICS

● Spinning for Peace

Nov 2 - One of Sri Lanka's most successful bowlers, Muttiah Muralitharan, urged the government and Tamil Tiger rebels to resume stalled talks to turn a truce into lasting peace after two decades of civil war.

Spin bowler Muralitharan, a Tamil himself, made his plea on 2 November during a three-day tour of the war-torn north with representatives of the United Nation's World Food Programme and foreign donors. The tour included a visit to the political and administrative stronghold of the Tamil Tigers.

"As a sportsman, all I can say is that Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims come together to play cricket side by side," Muralitharan said after a one-hour meeting with Sudha Master, the deputy political head of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). "Likewise, the politicians and the LTTE must come together and make peace for the good of this country's people," he said after seeing the destruction caused by years of fighting.

"The LTTE is willing to come to the peace table and, although I don't know about the government's position or the procedures involved, the people of the south want peace. The government must fulfil their wishes and come for negotiations."

Cricket is an exceedingly popular sport in Sri Lanka, enthusiastically played by Tamils and Sinhalese alike. Muralitharan has used a break from international cricket after a shoulder operation in August to focus on humanitarian work in disadvantaged communities in Sri Lanka's rural areas.

The 32-year-old was invited to the northern towns of Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Vavuniya as a "partner against hunger" by the United Nation's World Food Pragramme, which is providing aid to thousands of the war's innocent victims.

Muralitharan has just returned to Sri Lanka after a global tour to raise funds to raise funds for his own charity, the Gunasekera-Muralidaran Foundation, which runs about 60 community projects in the south.

A controversial off spinner who bowls with a super-flexible wrist and locked elbow, Muarlitharan broke Courtney Walsh's 519-wicket Test record in May but since his injury has been overtaken by Australia's Shane Warne. Muralitharan will travel to Australia later in the month for a check-up of his bowling shoulder by his surgeon David Young. His rehabilitation has gone smoothly and he hopes to be fit enough to tour New Zealand in late December and January. (Reuters)

● A rare gift

A doctor's life was saved by his former patient's son, when he donated part of his liver to the ailing doctor.

Dr. Kapuwatte had developed liver cancer and had very little hope of surviving. For lack of a donor, with a compatible blood group. After searching for over two months without luck, Ishantha Stephen came to the rescue by agreeing to donate part of his liver.

Dr. Kapuwatte was Mr. Stephen's family doctor and had known the family for many years. The doctor had treated Mr. Stephen's father for diabetes for many years. After his father's death the doctor remained a close friend of the family. "I could talk to him and approach him about anything," Mr. Stephen told the Daily Mirror.

It isn't a wonder that Mr. Stephen had no hesitation in his decision to donate almost half of his liver. The operation was performed by Dr. K.C. Tan in Singapore, in August 2002. Mr. Stephen's surgery took 8 hours.

He is now back at work. Though he still does have pain around the scar and often feels tired, he is rapidly mending. "My liver will regenerate and I expect to be back to normal in about six months time," he said.

Mr. Stephen's fiancée, is very proud of him, even though their wedding had to be postponed due to the transplant. According to Mr. Stephens they will be married some time next year.

Dr. Kapuwatte is also doing very well after the surgery and had visited Mr. Stephen and his family in Kandy. He left for Singapore last night (31 October) for a checkup. *(Courtesy: Daily Mirror, Colombo)*

● The scourge of maid servants in the middle east

Oct 25 - Muslims around the world are earning unnecessary bad name because of the some ignorant people in the Middle East. Having maid servants has become a status symbol, like Mercedes parked in the drive way. Having foreign maid servants is a lose-lose situation, except for boosting the ego of people who have no other way to boost their ego with. There are harrowing stories on both sides.

The victims are the maids and the children of the ignorant parents who hire them and entrust their children in their care. Many such children, under the care of the maids, have been sexually abused. For example, a male child kept complaining about pain in his private parts. Later, it was discovered the maid has been sexually abusing him. This is not an isolated case.

Many similar cases have been reported. There was a bizarre case of a Philippino maid baking a child in the oven and attempting to eat him. The children 'raised' by foreign maids also suffer immense psychological, cultural and religious fallout which could have long lasting detrimental effects in their adulthood. A hefty price will be paid by the society which has become slaves to a false sense of status consciousness, and failed to foresee the ill effects of an alien culture.

In the past, mothers have raised children, some times as many as 6 or 10, without the benefits of most of the modern day conveniences such as the refrigerators, washing machines, microwave ovens and what have you. There is no real reason why mothers of today need servants, especially with all the electronic appliances at their disposal. Slavery has been abolished by Islam, yet we have now resorted to a new form of slavery - in the form of maid servants.

Even in the United States and Canada, many nanny abuses have been captured by hidden video cameras - scenes of child battering which would make the hearts of every parent bleed. Then what should one expect of maids, who are away from their own families and in most cases their own children, maids who are sexually abused by their masters, maids who are forced to work under slave like conditions, abused mentally, physically and traumatised in many other ways, and some times denied of their hard earned wages? When these maids return to their home countries they carry with them not only the scars of such mistreatment, but

also deep hatred for Arabs and Muslims.

Abuse of maids is not a special feature to the middle east. Many nannies have been forced into prostitution, raped and even murdered in Singapore, Japan, Israel and other parts of the world. It seems that hapless people, at the brink of starvation, who abandon their own children at home to become modern day slaves, are a fair game to the rich, irrespective of national or religious boundaries. The religious scholars in Saudi Arabia have been lashing out at this practice and the ill-treatment of the maid servants, but those who should be listening to these exaltations are usually not at the mosques. They are busy watching Miami Vice or steamy soap operas on their satellite TVs. *(Courtesy of "Engr. Meer Sahib "msahib@rogers.com)*

● Prabhakaran as Lord Krishna

In an editorial to mark Diwali, a Tamil language daily, the Colombo-based "Sudar Oli" has portrayed the LTTE Supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran, as Lord Krishna who is all set to liberate the Tamil people from the thralldom of the modern-day "Narakasura", namely, the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan state.

Rhe newspaper that just as in the mythological tale relating to Diwali, the masses were yearning for deliverance from the demon king Narakasura, the Tamils of Sri Lanka were yearning for liberation from the thralldom of Sinhala majoritarian rule.

In an obvious reference to LTTE leader Prabhakaran, Sudar Oli said that the "new" Lord Krishna had given the clarion call for a struggle against today's Narakasuras and was ready to go into battle.

The Tamils of India and Sri Lanka believe that Diwali relates to Krishna's killing of Narakasura and represents the triumph of good over evil or the defeat of oppressive forces at the hands of the righteous. "It is certain that adharma (evil) will be defeated and dharma (righteousness) will win. And the Tamils are waiting for the re-establishment of dharma. But the question that the Tamils should ask themselves is whether they are fit to accept the coming regime of dharma," the paper said.

"If the Tamils are at this stage, when they are on the verge of getting back their lost rights and freedom, it is because of the bravery and sacrifices of the liberation fighters (the LTTE). But the question that the Tamils should ask is whether they are leading a morally upright life to be worthy of the boon that is going to be bestowed on them," Sudar Oli said.

"It is time the Tamils abjured divisive tendencies based on caste, religion and ideologies, and paved the way for a system based on equality and social justice... The Diwali festival should be an occasion to solemnly pledge themselves to lead such lives and be worthy of freedom," it said. "We should remember that the other occasion on which lamps should be lit and a similar pledge taken is to come in 15 days," the paper said. The reference was to the annual Heroes' Day oration of the LTTE Supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran on November 27, when he will set forth the LTTE's view of the Tamil struggle and the direction it will take. *(Hindustan Times)*

● "Leader of All Seasons" and "War and Peace"

Two books, "Leader of All Seasons," a book on LTTE Leader Velupillai Pirapaharan and "War and Peace," a book authored by the LTTE's Political Advisor and Chief Negotiator, Mr. Anton Balasingham, were released at the the Annual General Meeting of Ilankai Tamil Sangam (ITS), USA held in New York on 6 November. were released during the event. "Leader of All Seasons" was produced in Tamil by the International Federation of Tamils (IFT) in Switzerland to commemorate the 50th birthday of Pirapaharan and contains photographs of key events in LTTE Leader's life.

Visuwanathan Rudrakumaran, Legal Advisor to the LTTE, releasing Mr. Balasingham's book, "War and Peace," reportedly said, "What distinguishes this book from others on Tamil struggle is that author Mr Balasingham is widely regarded as the authoritative commentator on the politico-military struggle of LTTE. He has been the Chief Negotiator during the recent peace talks and has participated in all previous peace talks, and has been the closest confidante of LTTE leader Pirapaharan from the beginning of armed struggle in early 1970s. Balasingham illuminates the reader on what transpired in the recent peace talks and points out that the major impediment to the peace process is the lack of coherent policy in the Sinhala South. He says the absence of consensus within the Sinhala polity on a framework for political settlement and the lack of political will, will continue to bedevil future negotiations."

● In the bribery net

The Bribery Commission has given former Dputy Dfence Mnister, Anuruddha Ratwatte, at his request four more weeks to account for over Rs. 45 million.

Earlier the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption had sent a show cause notice asking him to explain how he amassed this sum. The commission sought Ratwatte to respond on or before November 2.

UNP heavyweight S. B. Dissanayake too was given extra time to account for Rs. 29 million in assets. He was arrested and produced before Colombo Chief Magistrate on 9 November as he was unable to account for the assets. Dissanayake was released on cash bail of Rs. 25,000 and personal bail of Rs. 100,000 with two sureties. It is said that Ratwatte too would have to be arrested and produced in court if he failed to satisfactorily explain his wealth.

The action comes hot on the heels of the arrest of Police Ombudsman DIG Seneviratne Banda and Director General of General Staff D. S. K. Wijesuriya as they failed to account for Rs. 3.5 million and Rs. 1.9 million respectively.

The commission is in the process of investigating several others, including former and present leading politicians and public officials, for being in possession vast amounts of wealth in terms of money and property they have amassed. ❑

DIY General Insurance
www.armassociates.co.uk - useful links - ARM Online Insurance

NEWS TRACK

Anti-LTTE posters: Oct 25 - Posters appeared in several parts of Batticaloa town attacking the Liberation Tigers and warning local journalists against reporting on the LTTE. The posters have been reportedly put up by the loyalists of former LTTE commander Mr. Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (Karuna). Meanwhile, a correspondent of a Tamil paper is reported to have alleged that he was threatened by two gunmen in Batticaloa town. Mr. C. Chandraparakash, the Batticaloa correspondent and district office manager of the Tamil daily Thinakkural, said he was going home when two men riding a motorbike had stopped him by the road and had threatened him with a pistol, warning him not to cover LTTE functions in Batticaloa and not to publish statements issued by the Tigers.

The 'Karuna Group' had been accused of murdering senior Tamil journalist Mr. Aiyathurai Nadesan in Batticaloa in May this year. Three leading Tamil journalists in Batticaloa sought asylum in Switzerland after the renegade commander's associates gunned down their colleague and threatened them with death.

Over 3000 graduates in job training: Oct 25 - Three thousand two hundred and fifty seven graduates recruited under the job recruitment scheme launched by the United Freedom Alliance (UPFA) government are currently undergoing six months' training in eight administrative districts in the Northeast Province. The training programme commenced on October 21 as scheduled.

According to the provincial public administration ministry sources the inaugural event of the training programmes were held at several centres throughout the Northeast. After six months training they would be posted to permanent posts in the government sector in the Northeast Province, the sources said.

Top Tiger leader returns after treatment: Oct 25 - The commander of the LTTE's naval operations, Thillayampalam Sivaneshan, better known as Col. Soosai, returned home after medical treatment in Singapore thereby ending speculation that he had led another split in the Tamil Tiger movement. He left for Singapore during the previous week to check on a bullet lodged in his body during a shootout with government forces in the late 1980s. LTTE sources said that he had been treated without surgery and his condition had improved.

There had been media speculation on whether Soosai would return from Singapore to lead his elite Sea Tiger unit which has inflicted heavy losses on the Sri Lankan navy. The Tigers denied media reports that Soosai had fallen out of favour with its leadership in a replay of a split led by another regional commander, V. Muralitharan, who broke away in March. Soosai and his medical team used Sri Lankan military helicopters for their travels to from the rebel-held north of the island to and from the country's only international airport.

One killed, two injured in Colombo attack: Oct 25 - A youth was shot dead and two were injured when unidentified gunmen opened fire on a group of Tamils suspected to be members of for LTTE commander 'Karuna' in a predominantly Tamil suburb in Colombo. One youth was injured very seriously in the attack, Police in Wellawatte said. He was rushed to the Kalubowila Hospital for emergency treatment, according to Police. Four young Tamil men had moved into a rented home in Roxy Gardens in Wellawatte recently, and they were the target of this shooting allegedly by the Tamil Tigers, Police said.

Swiss national killed in Batticaloa: Oct 26 - A Swiss national was killed in a grenade blast on 25 October, Monday night in Batticaloa. The victim, Mr. Ken Ulrich, 61, was at his home in Mamangam, a suburb of Batticaloa town, when an unidentified person lobbed a grenade at him, according to police sources. Mr. Ulrich having married a Tamil woman from Batticaloa has been living in the eastern town for several years. News reports alleged that Mr Ulrich, who has been married to a Tamil woman and has resided in eastern Sri Lanka for a number of years, was reportedly killed by the Tamil Tigers for non-payment of "taxes". Dismissing the allegation of involvement in the killing, LTTE in a Press Release issued on accused a news report as being "based on speculation and concoction of a story to discredit the LTTE."

"Our attention is drawn to a news item relating to the killing of a Swiss national in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. The media organisation that has reported this incident quotes the local police and alleges that the killing was carried out by the LTTE. We strongly dismiss this allegation which is based on speculation and concoction of a story to discredit the LTTE," the LTTE said. This killing gains more significance in view of the victim being a Swiss national. "This has been planned in such a way to portray the LTTE in bad light. Our leadership views this with grave concern and condemns the killing. Perpetrators of this crime have in mind a criminal objective to disrupt the peace process," the LTTE said.

Abductions of youth: Oct 27 - In one of the many cases of abduction which have become common especially in eastern Sri Lanka, police reported that a sixteen-year-old schoolboy had been allegedly forcibly taken away from Valachchenai in Batticaloa. According to Eravur Police, LTTE cadres had reportedly come in two motorbikes and had taken away the boy, a student attached to the Hindu College in Valachchenai. He was at the three-wheeler park in the town to deliver his fathers raincoat when he was abducted. The boy's distraught parents have reportedly informed of the incident to the police.

In another case, a teenager allegedly abducted and detained by the LTTE had managed to escape from a LTTE camp at Sampoor in Trincomalee on 26 October. After fleeing from the LTTE camp, he had surrendered himself at an Army checkpoint in Thoppur. An army spokesman reportedly said the seventeen-year old youngster was abducted on October 22 and had been detained by LTTE in order to be sent to Vavuniya for arms training. The youngster was produced before the Court on 27 October after which he was formally handed over to his parents.

Two abducted PLOTE cadres missing: Oct 28 - Two members of the PLOTE, an ex-Tamil militant group in Vavuniya, were abducted by unidentified gunmen in a suburb of the northern border town, Sri Lanka Police said. Their whereabouts are not yet known, according to Police. The PLOTE cadres have been missing since 26 October, Tuesday night, relatives said. The two, Mr. Jeyamanokaran Navaratnam, 25, and Mr. Sellaiya Selvarasa, were riding a motorbike when they were stopped and abducted by gunmen at Pandarikulam, a suburb of Vavuniya town. Their motorbike was found abandoned on the way.

Navy rescues five Tamil youth: Oct 29 - Navy rescued five Tamil youth including three teenagers at Nilaveli in Trincomalee on 28 October, when allegedly two LTTE cadres were taking them away forcibly in a cab to the Sampoor LTTE camp in the Trincomalee district in eastern Sri Lanka. A military spokesman reportedly said that navy personnel at a checkpoint in Nilaveli had stopped the cab and found these youth. The Navy had then handed over the five Tamil youth, all between ages 16 to 24, to the Trincomalee office of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, who later handed them over to the UNICEF representatives in

Trincomalee.

Clahes between Islamic sects: Oct 31 - Police declared unofficial curfew in Kattankudy, a large Muslim town 5 kilometres south of Batticaloa, after mobs demolished a mosque and several houses and buildings belonging to an Islamic sect. Special Task Force (STF) commandos were called in after Police failed to control crowds of orthodox Muslims armed with clubs and machetes stormed the main mosque and a computer centre of the influential Islamic sect led by the charismatic cleric known as 'Payilvaan'. Police said crowds were called up by muezzins from orthodox mosques in the thickly populated town.

On 31 October, Sunday afternoon STF and Police were still trying to control crowds attacking the homes families that follow Payilvaan's teachings, sources in Kattankudy said.

Those belonging to orthodox Islam say that Payilvaan, a person without any basic knowledge of Islam and Arabic, has been misguiding many people in his hometown Maruthamunai then in Kattankudy and Colombo. He has written few books misinterpreting Islam and misguiding the people. His writings and preachings show his Sufi leanings. Many of them don't even pray five times and they are more into workshipping graves whish is prohibited in Islam.

The also allege that the demolished building was built to burry this guy "Pailwan" and his wife in the ground floor when they die, then his followers can throw flowers from upstairs. Brave youths have demolished this building in the heart of Muslim town.

Payilvaan's followers charged that a group of young preachers trained in Saudi Arabia were behind the attack. "They are trying to force everyone to follow Wahabism. They are paid to do this by the Saudis," one of them alleged. His supporters claim that Payilvaan, an Islamic scholar, has written extensively against Wahabi orthodoxy. His writings and preachings show his Sufi leanings. Many rich Muslim businessmen and farmers on the east coast are his followers. Out of them are Mr Hameed the co-owner of "French Corner" and H. I Hussain who is originally from Kattankudy currently based in Colombo.

Japanese envoy meets LTTE: Nov 1 – At a meeting between Japanese Special Envoy Mr. Yasushi Akashi and the head of the LTTE's political division Mr. S. P Thamilchelvan, Mr Akashi emphasized the necessity for resuming dialogue in the interest of sustaining the momentum of peace built over the last two and a half years. Mr.Akashi told the LTTE's political head that his discussion with the Sri Lankan President made him feel that she was genuine in her commitment to the peace process and therefore he would encourage the LTTE too to enter negotiations without further delay.

Responding to Mr. Akashi's concern, Mr.Thamilchelvan said that the LTTE remains firmly committed to the peace process and it is exactly one year today that the proposal for an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) was submitted to the Sri Lankan government but that Colombo had not yet indicated its readiness to resume talks, although it expresses sincerity and commitment in mere words only.

"Parochial political concerns and lack of consensus in the south are delaying the peace process and humanitarian delivery to the war affected people of the northeast", Tamilchelvan reportedly told Mr.Akashi. It was time, Mr.Thamilchelvan had reportedly said that the Sri Lankan Government seriously considered the unconditional support offered by the main opposition to take forward the peace process, sinking narrow political considerations.

Bomb thrown at LTTE office: Nov 1 - A Karuna loyalist is reported to have thrown a hand grenade at the LTTE's Mavadivembu Political Office in Batticaloa on 31 October evening. Police said

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that despite the blast no casualties or damage was reported. The office had been closed since Karuna' defection from the LTTE, but was reopened two weeks ago. At the time of the incident there were no LTTE cadres in the office. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission has been informed of the incident.

No Indian Film Stars on Greeting Cards: Nov 1 - LTTE has issued stern warnings in Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka for both printers and storekeepers that Greeting cards bearing the photos of Indian film stars should not be printed or sold in Tamil areas. Indian film stars, especially the South Indian Tamil stars are popular among the Jaffna youth, and Deepavali greeting cards bear the photos of Tamil actors and actresses. Several Tamils in Jaffna are annoyed by this announcement by the LTTE, as one school teacher puts it: "This is childish, a silly thing for an organization like LTTE." The Tigers, however, are treating this as a serious matter. Before 1995, when LTTE was controlling Jaffna, Indian Tamil films, newspapers and journals were also banned by the LTTE.

Muslims protest in the East: Nov 1 - Hundreds of Muslim civilians, students and members of civil organizations in the Eastern province staged several demonstrations in the Eastern province to commemorate 14 years since Muslims were evicted from the North by the LTTE.

Students of the Southeast University in the Eastern Province staged a protest demonstration in Oluvil, where they called upon President Chandrika Kumaratunga to appoint a special Commission to assess the value of the losses to date incurred by the affected people. They also called for the immediate steps to be taken to resettle and re-habilitate the ousted Muslims in their respective areas. "Safety must be guaranteed and the LTTE and the Government must honour their rights, No taxes and extortion can be levied from the Muslims on and after the re-settlements," they said.

In another demonstration in Batticaloa, some 5000 Muslims carrying placards demanded the immediate resettlement of Muslims. They also urged the International Community to give ears to the plight of the Muslims in the North East. A leaflet was also distributed among the public, explaining how the Muslims were driven off within 24 hours leaving all their belongings, properties, lands and houses 14 years ago. Meanwhile, in Trincomalee, posters were put up condemning the LTTE for driving off Muslims 14 years ago. "Murderous LTTE drove off Muslims from the North 14 years ago," "Let defeat the plan of the Vanni LTTE to drive off Tamils and Muslims of the East who are against the Vanni LTTE," "Lives of the Eastern people are in danger," "Let us save the Eastern people from the LTTE claws," the posters said.

Bombs found at Trinco harbour: Nov 1 - Two M4 Grade bombs have been found in the inner harbour in Trincomalee near the office of the North East Provincial Council. A civilian is reported to have tipped off the police, who had then gone to the area and after searching for several hours had found the two bombs. The bombs were recovered at the place where the navy usually berth their boats, according to EPDP sources.

LTTE office in Denmark raided: Nov 2 - The office in Denmark belonging to an LTTE front organization named Thamilar Orungu Inaippu Onryam, was raided by Danish police, according to a Danish news report. The report said police removed computers, floppies and CDs, files, account books, and other sensitive documents from the office, located in Copenhagen. It added, "This raid of the office was carried out by the police on the permission given by a law court in Denmark." The Danish government has suggested to the European Union that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam be placed on its list of terrorist organisations.

Denmark's Minister of Foreign Per Stig Moller reportedly told the Danish Parliament (Folketing) that the government would take necessary action to ensure that the terrorist lists of America and the European Union would not differ on the inclusion of the LTTE. The Foreign Minister's statement was made in reply to a written question raised by Denmark People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) Member of Parliament Peter Skarup on October 7, over the visit to Denmark of Balakumar, a leader of the LTTE and why the Tigers had not been included in the European Union's list of terrorist organisations.

President meets opposition leader: Nov 2 - Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga urged opposition leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe to participate in the all party National Advisory Council on the peace process to find a solution to end the island's ethnic conflict. Mr. Wickremesinghe and President Kumaratunga met in Colombo for discussions on Tuesday, 2 October. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was also present at the discussion.

A press release by the Presidential Secretariat said that the President briefed him on the proceedings of the National Advisory Council for Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR) held on the previous day and on plans for future meetings of the Council.

The President emphasized the importance of the UNP's participation in the Council and requested Wickremesinghe to reconsider the party's decision for non-participation in the NACPR.

The opposition leader drew particular attention to the UNP statement on its position regarding the Oslo Declaration and communiqué and the Tokyo Declaration and emphasized the urgent need of early resumption of peace talks on the basis stated by the UNP. He reiterated that there was "a clear agreement between the government and the LTTE to explore a federal solution as the basis of a political resolution of the ethnic conflict".

The discussions were informative and constructive and covered number of matters relating to the peace process. The President and the opposition leader agreed that they would continue to meet from time to time.

Wanted posters for 6 Karuna cadres: Nov 2 - Six field commanders of the Karuna group have been put on the 'Most Wanted Persons' list by the LTTE Vanni faction, whose group in the east had distributed leaflets to that effect, according to sources in eastern Sri Lanka.

The leaflets carried the names and photographs of the six outlawed Tigers, who have been branded as traitors and criminals by the Vanni group. The leaflet released by the political division of the Batticalao - Amparai districts, has sought the details of those six members of the Karuna group including Sinnathambi, Marakkan, Mangalan, Imiya Bharathi, Uruththirai and Pillaiaiyan who were heads of the lowest rungs of Karuna's military machinery. The leaflets requested the public to come forward with information on the whereabouts of these wanted cadres to enable the Vanni forces to arrest or eliminate them.

Posters too had been put up on the same lines but with the addition of the message "We will soon identify other Tamil traitors too, who are surreptitiously working against us," sources added.

Suspect 'informant' shot dead: Nov 3 - A former member of the LTTE lately residing in Negombo was shot dead at Munnakkare a suburb of Negombo on Tuesday, 2 November, police said. The victim identified as 22-year-old youth Kumaravelu Pathmakumar was reportedly suspected by the LTTE to be an informant of the security forces for sometime. At the time of his murder, Pathmakumar from Karainagar in Jaffna had been living at Negombo with his wife and child and working as a labourer. The victim was returning on a push cycle after work when a gang which came in a three wheeler reportedly shot him dead.

Indian general visits line of control: Oct 3 - Indian army commander General N. C Vij visited the main entry point to the territories held by the LTTE in Sri Lanka's north. He saw the line of control and the forward defences of the Sri Lanka army at the Omanthai entry point on the A9 highway, 15 kilometres north of

Vavuniya.

Earlier in the day the Indian army commander had discussions with Maj.Gen. Parami Kulatunga, Sri Lankan Security Forces commander for Vanni and Mr. Mahinda Baddewela, Deputy Inspector General of Police (Vanni Range) at the JOSSOP camp in Vavuniya. Meanwhile, Mrs. Rita Vij visited an orphanage in Atamasgassa, a Sinhala village near Vavuniya town. She distributed gifts to the children at the orphanage.

Abduction attempt foiled: Nov 4 – Police in eastern Batticalo alleged an attempt by Tamil Tigers to abduct two civilians including a female was foiled by them. Military Spokesman Brigadier Daya Ratnayake said that the abductors on a tipper lorry were carrying the two civilians. When one of the victims had managed to signal the Police at the roadblock, the truck was on its way to a LTTE controlled area. The police had however been able to rescue the two civilians but the LTTE cadres had fled the scene.

Shot dead in Colombo: Nov 6 - Mr. Velayutham Dayalakumar, 44, whose father works at the offices of the TULF, was shot dead allegedly by LTTE gunmen in Dehiwela, a suburb in the southern outskirts of Colombo, around 7.30 p.m. Thursday, on 4 November.

A man identified as 'Jayasingha' was seriously wounded in the attack by unidentified gunmen in a very busy part of Dehiwela Junction. Dayalakumar and Jayasingha were shot when they were having tea at Sumihiri Hotel at Dehiwela Junction, according to Police.

Mr. Dayalakumar, also known as Dayalan, had a business near Dehiwela Junction. He was associated with the PLOTE in his younger days, but for the last several years he remained politically inactive trying hard to make ends meet. In a letter reportedly sent to the Norwegian Ambassador in Colombo, Dayalan's father Mr Velayutham has contradicted reports in the local Tamil media and the TamilNet website that his son was a member of any armed paramilitary group. He also revealed that his son was a candidate of the TULF sponsored Tamil National Alliance (TNA) in the parliamentary general elections held on 2001 and was never an informant or spy as alleged by some Tamil dailies in Colombo..

In his letter he states that he continues to work as a typist in the TULF office for Mr Ananatha Sangaree and other TNA MPs like Mr Mavai Senathirajaha and Mr Sambanthan. Aserting that he still continues to be strong supporter of the TULF, Mr Velayautham in his letter states, "Even today though our party Secretary General R.Sampanthan has temporarily severed connections with the party, he used to visit our office and he continues to get his works done through me. Similarly Mavai Senathirajah MP too gets his works done by us. This is only a temporary rift within our party."

Grenade shatters peace in Muslim town: Nov 6 - Two days of relative calm in Kattankudy, a large Muslim town in Batticaloa torn by religious rioting since 31 October, was shattered when a man suspected to be a member of an armed Islamic group lobbed a grenade at the home of a Sufi Muslim. Police patrolling the riot afflicted area gave chase to the attacker and took him into custody. A spokesman for Abdur Rauf Mowlavi, the leading Sufi cleric of Kattankudy, repeated the charge that a Wahabi extremist group funded by powerful sources in the Middle East is responsible for the violence.

Grenade attack on doctor's home: Nov 7 - Unidentified persons lobbed a grenade at a doctor's home on Upstair Road in Puliyanthivu, a high security suburb of Batticaloa town, Saturday(6) night around 7 p.m. The reason for the attack is not clear, Police said. No one was hurt in the explosion. The attacked house is situated behind the office of the EPDP.

Security beefed up in Colombo: Nov 7 – Defence authorities have introduced spot roadblocks with heavily armed police officers in Colombo and suburbs. The roadblocks came up just hours following a series of politically motivated killings in the capital allegedly by LTTE pistol group members.

According to police reports, the department has decided to set up these check points in over 100 junctions in the areas of Colombo and suburbs. Reports however claimed that these check points will not inconvenience the public but will be a security measure and was carried out with the intention of preventing any future unwarranted incidents such as the most recent killings.

Bomb lobbed at ex-teacher's house: Nov 8 - A house on the Hanuman Kovil road in Batticaloa was damaged on 6 November, Saturday evening around 7 p.m. after a bomb thrown by suspected LTTE cadres exploded. The house belonged to retired school teacher P. Selvarajan..

Meanwhile, in another bomb throwing incident in Katankudy, police arrested a suspect for throwing a bomb at a house and produced him before Batticaloa Magistrate M. H. M. Ajmir, who ordered that he be remanded till November 9.

Monk lashes out at JHU: Nov 8 - The convener of National Patriotic Movement, Ven. Elle Gunawansa Thera has lashed out at the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) saying that it has done much damage to the image of bhikku community going against those who voted for them sincerely for a worthy cause.

The Ven. Gunawansa Thera said, "the monks of the Jathika Hela Urumaya should take the full responsibility for the damage caused." He said that JHU monks went on to act against the advice of the most Ven. Senior Mahanayake Theras when they decided to throw themselves into electoral politics forfeiting their position as advisors.

"Why enlist yourself among politicians when you can guide them from a higher level from your existing position as their advisors?" he asked. He said he opposed the very idea of the JHU monks setting up a political party at the outset. Referring to currently raging internal conflict within the JHU, the Thera said, "I publicly declared that this would end up in chaos which has now proved itself as what is seen within the JHU today," he explained. He also said it was a shame that the JHU monks had misused Buddhist flags, the Great Bodhi tree and Buddhist terminologies in their political campaigns to achieve political power.

Asked about Hela Urumaya's former Secretary Thilak Karunaratne's decision to resign from the JHU to join the UNP, the Ven. Thera said that it meant that Thilak Karunaratne had finished his temporary role of acting as a patriot to join what suits him the best.

Balasingham back in Kilinochchi: Nov 9 - Political advisor of the Liberation Tigers, Mr. Anton Balasingham, arrived from the UK where he normally resides in Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka on 9 November in a Sri Lankan Air Force helicopter provided by the Government. He was accompanied by his wife Ms. Adele Balasingham. On his arrival, Mr. Balasingham was welcomed by Col. Soosai, Commander of the Sea Tigers and Mr. S. P Thamilchelvan, head of the LTTE's political division. He is expected hold consultations with the leader of theLTTE, Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, in preparation for the discussions they are expected to have with the Norwegian foreign minister Mr. Jan Peterson and his peace team later in the week.

Due to harsh weather conditions in Vanni and his delicate health

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condition, Balasingham will be staying in Kilinochchi for not more than a week before returning to his London residence, TamilNet reported.

Brigadier's vehicle attacked: Nov 9 - The vehicle of the Sri Lanka army's 23-2 Brigade commander came under pistol and hand grenade attack from unidentified men near Jetty Camp, Valaichchenai in eastern Sri Lanka in the morning on 8 November while the vehicle was proceeding towards Valaichchenai. Army reports alleged that cadres belonging to the Tamil Tigers were responsible for the attack, but the Tigers strongly denied any involvement.

According to army reports, the left-hand side of the windscreen and the buffer of the vehicle recieved two pistol shots and damages caused by the explosion, although the Brigade Commander was not inside the vehicle when it came under attack.The matter was referred to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) since it was regarded a serious violation of the ceasefire, army sources said. SLMM representatives visited the scene along with the Police and troops.

Reports further said that two Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) supporters were engaged in distributing their party literature had also been in the area when the army vehicle was attacked. The pistol men, believed to have operated seemingly from a rooftop or a raised platform, had fired towards the Army vehicle that was on the road at the same time. In the melee, according to a report by Sri Lanka Army, fear-stricken EPDP Seelan seemingly aware what was going to happen had taken to his heels and crept into a nearby hardware shop in search of protection, leaving behind policemen. The unidentified assailants then threw a hand grenade towards the fleeing EPDP supporter but it missed the target and hit another civilian who rushed out from the shop to find what was happening outside. The hand grenade explosion injured the civilian, Ahmed Lebbe (48) of Kattankudy when the attackers threw the hand grenade.

Denying the allegation that they were behind a grenade attack, the LTTE in a statement issued to the press on 8 November the LTTE condemned the attack and said the Sri Lankan government should investigate and bring the culprits to book as the incident had occurred in an area under its control. "We remain firmly committed to the cease fire despite such insidious attempts by traiterous anti national elements to precipitate a confrontation between the Sri Lanka army and us", the Tigers said.

"Already two states in the island": Nov 10 - "The objective before us is to make our own constitution on the basis of our sovereignty, which is inalienable. We have the right to do it. The signing of the ceasefire agreement between the leader of the Tamil nation and the Prime Minister of the Sinhala nation proved that there are two states on this island. Our legal experts proved at the Trial at Bar proceedings against the leaders of the Tamil United Liberation Front in 1976 that the Sinhala nation had no right to adjudicate in the affairs of the Tamils as they did not accede their sovereignty to the Sri Lankan constitution of 1972", said Mr. Mavai Senathirajah, Tamil National Alliance MP for Jaffna, speaking at the opening of the new building of the Thamil Eelam Law College in Kilinochchi on 10 November.

The Thamil Eelam Law College was declared open by Ms. Adele Balasingham, wife of the LTTE's chief political advisor, Mr Anton Blanasingham.

Senior LTTE officials, civil society leaders, representatives of UNICEF, UNHCR, lawyers from Jaffna, Vavuniya, and Vanni attended the opening ceremony of the new building of the Thamil Eelam Law College, situated next to the Thamil Eelam Court complex by the A9 Highway in Kilinochchi in northern Sri Lanka.

"Our leader's main objective was to establish and promote this college in order to produce legal experts and lawyers to uphold the Rule of Law so that our people can safeguard their rights. We want to raise the level of this college to match international standards. This endeavour has been greatly assisted by legal experts from abroad. We have already trained six batches of more than hundred and forty lawyers in our college," said Mr. E. Pararajasingham, head of Thamil Eelam Judiciary, speaking at the opening ceremony. Mr. P. Nadesan, Chief of Thamil Eelam Police Service and Dr. S. Somaskandan, of the LTTE's International Secretariat in the Vanni also spoke at the function.

The Thamil Eelam Law College was established in 1991 in Jaffna. It was moved to Puthukudiyiruppu in Mullaithivu after the Sri Lanka army took control of the Jaffna peninsula in 1995.

Health employees in protest demonstraton: Nov 10 - Hundreds of employees of North East Department of Health Services held a one hour demonstration at the junction along Inner Harbour Road in Trincomalee that leads to the office of Provincial Governor and later went in a procession and handed over a memorandum to a representative of the Governor demanding that they be paid the increased salary of three thousand rupees as paid to employees of other provincial councils in Sri Lanka, according to trade union sources.

They demanded that the employees of the northeast health sector should be treated on par with employees in other provincial councils now administered by elected administration. The All Ceylon Health Services Union (ACHSU) organized the protest and health sector employees from the district of Batticaloa, Amparai and Trincomalee participated. Health sector employees later held a meeting in the children's playground located in front of the office of the provincial governor.

Trade union leaders said they would launch trade union action crippling the entire health services if the provincial governor failed to pay the increased salary anomalies to northeast health sector employees on par with the other provincial councils before November 22.

Norwegian FM meets President: Nov 11 - Norwegian Foreign Minister Mr. Jan Petersen met with Sri Lanka's President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, and discussed the resumption of peace process between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Mr. Petersen was accompanied by Mr. Vidal Helgesen, the Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Erik Solheim, Special envoy to Sri Lanka, and Mr. Hans Brattskar, the Norwegian Ambassador in Sri Lanka. Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was associated with President Kumaratunga.

Norwegian FM meets Tiger Leader: Nov 11 - Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jan Peterson, began discussions with leader of the Liberation Tigers, Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, in Kilinochchi on 11 November. The talks were expected to cover the current state of Sri Lanka's peace process and efforts to further stabilize the ceasefire between the LTTE and Colombo. The LTTE leader was assisted by Mr. Balasingham at the discussions with the Norwegian Foreign Minister.

Mr. Peterson was accompanied by Deputy Norwegian Foreign Minister, Mr. Vidar Helgesen, Mr. Eric Solheim and Norway's ambassador in Colombo, Mr. Hans Brattskar.

Speaking to journalists after the meeting between the leader of the LTTE and Norway's Foreign Minister. Mr. Anton Balasingham said, "President Kumaratunga has sent no new message through the Norwegian Foreign Minister. She has only reiterated her stand that there should be talks on a permanent political solution. We have conveyed a message to her on how to take the peace process forward. But the Norwegians have requested us not to speak about it to the press until they discuss it with the Sri Lankan President."

"The Tamil people have been talking about a permanent set-

(continued on page 41)

A WARRIOR'S END

CHAIRMAN YASSER ARAFAT'S six decade long personal struggle for the emancipation of his people has come to an end. In contrast to other iconic figures who led their people against the forces of colonialism, the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation was unable to secure freedom for his nation before he succumbed to an undiagnosed illness. However, Mr. Arafat's achievement was in some ways even more monumental given the conditions in which the Palestinians began their national liberation movement. They had barely begun to create a sense of oneness when they were struck in full force by Western imperialism and the Zionist enterprise. The powers that drew the political map of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea refused to recognise even the existence of the people who had lived there for generations. For long these powers went along with the Zionist fiction that this territory was "a land without people" that should be given to "a people without a land." The Palestinians were given almost no succour and support when they were first driven out of 80 per cent of their homeland and very little effective help as they were subjected to colonial oppression in the strips of territory left in their possession. While the major powers in the so-called democratic world treated them with disdain, some of their Arab brethren were inclined to exploit rather than assist them. Mr. Arafat became the symbol of a scattered people because he, more than anyone else, preserved their national spirit and sustained their desire for liberty.

In assessing the great warrior's achievements, there are those who say he missed a historic opportunity to secure his peoples' future when he refused to accept the deal Israel offered during the Camp David talks in 2000. This is a baseless assessment. The Palestinians, who were clinging on to the remnants of the patrimony left in their possession after the creation of Israel, were understandably reluctant to make further territorial and other compromises as they were asked to do at Camp David. The Zionist state was the real culprit behind the collapse of the Oslo processes because it refused to offer a settlement that Mr. Arafat could make his people accept. While Israel did make an improved offer at the follow-up negotiations held in Taba a few months later, it was by then too late for a settlement since the second *intifada* was under way. Mr. Arafat's critics are also in error when they blame him for the violence that has rocked the region for the past four years. It was the Israeli extremist, Ariel Sharon, who goaded the Palestinians into a violent uprising by arrogantly marching through the Holy Sites in Jerusalem. With Israel systematically destroying the administrative and security infrastructure the Palestinian Authority had established, Mr. Arafat was deprived of the means to stop the suicide bombers. The controversies arising out of the mismanagement of the Authority's finances are more troublesome. While no one has ever accused Mr. Arafat of misappropriating public funds for his personal use, he was unable to dispel the impression that this money was sometimes used arbitrarily to consolidate his political position.

In coming together to form a collective leadership, the different streams of the Palestinian national movement tendered the tribute that would have pleased their beloved Chairman most. This leadership is a manifestation of the spirit of national unity that Mr. Arafat created and sustained over decades. The smoothness with which the different factions overcame their differences shows that there was always an underlying willingness to work together. This owed in large measure to the governing style of a master tactician who took care to see that no faction was completely alienated. While Mr. Arafat never allowed anyone to challenge his pre-eminence in Palestinian politics and society, his people always found him approachable. The leader's life has come to an end but he has left a shining legacy for his followers to build upon.

Editorial, The Hindu,
13 Nov 2004

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IN MEMORIAMS

Third Year Remembrance

In ever loving memory of ***Mrs Pavalam Ramasamy*** *who passed away on 29th November 2001.*
Dear Amma,
Everyone says that you left us, but to us you continue to live with us everyday. Sadly missed and fondly remembered by your loving children; Vijayakumar (Jaffna), Vijayadevi, Vijayarani and Jegasothy (all of London); in-laws Selva (Research Officer in Charge of Agricultural Research Station, Thirunelvely, Jaffna), Nathan, Sundaralingam, Thillainathan (all of London), Naguleswary (Jaffna); grandchildren Purushowththaman, Toothiransali, Luxana, Anand, Meni, Luxey and Vasanth.

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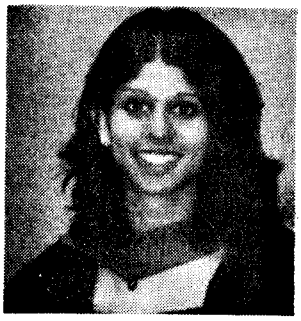
Fifth Year Remembrance



In ever loving memory of **Viranjani Rajika Malalgoda** on the fifth anniversary of her passing away under tragic circumstances on 7th November 1999.

We catch your smile on someone's face,
It tugs deep in our heart;
We feel your love in every place,
We're never far apart.

We hear your words in another's voice,
Your laugh in someone's fun;
To have you here today dear daughter,
Would be our only choice.

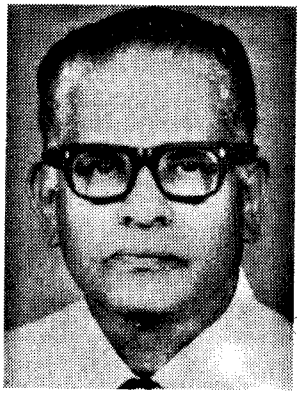
Love for ever
Mum and Dad

A precious heart stopped beating,
Hardworking hands at rest;
God broke our heart to prove us,
He only takes the best.

Love you always,
Rajeev Aiya and Saloni

- Mahinda & Indra Malalgoda, 96 Celeborn Street, South Woodham Ferrers, Essex, CM3 7AF. Tel: 01245 322852.

In Ever Loving Memory of Our Dearest Appah



Richard Jeyarajasingam

Born: 20.11.1928 Called to glory: 27.11.1990

It is hard to believe that
Fourteen years have passed:
Not a day went by without your thoughts.
Yet, as our Heavenly Father assures us that
'In His presence there is fullness of Joy'
(psalm 18.11)
We will encourage each other
With this promise until we meet again.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed
by Ranee and children
Ranjan, Seelan, Shanthi, Jeyanthy and their familles.

Sixth Death Anniversary

In Ever Loving Memory of ***Miss. Daisy Selvaranee Rasiah*** *on the sixth anniversary of her passing away on 10th November 1998.*

"Nothing Loved is ever lost
Memories Last for ever"

Remembered with Love and Great affection by her loving Sister Thevaranee and other members of the family.

- Miss. J.T.Rasiah, 64 Jessup Close, London SE18

In loving memory of ***Mr. P. V. Nadarajah*** *on the sixteenth anniversary of his passing away on 16th November 1988.*
Fondly remembered by his beloved wife Thilagavathy; loving children Usha, Varathan, Nalini and Nanthini; sons-in-law Sivanathan, Rajkumar and Vathsayan; daughter-in-law Savithiri; grandchildren Bairavi, Luxmi, Uruthiran, Abhirami, Sebestian and Isabel.
– Flat 15, Girtin House, 44 Brighton Road, Sutton, Surrey SM2 5JQ.
Tel: 020 8404 6541.

Mrs Chandra Ragupathy.

In ever loving memory of my wife ***Chandra*** *on the ninth anniversary of her passing away on 28th November 1995.*
Sadly missed and fondly remembered as always by her loving husband Ragupathy.
-262 Wricklemarsh Road, London SE3 8DW.

25th Anniversary Remembrance

Born: 14.8.1913 - Called to rest: 24.11.1979

In ever loving memory of ***Mr. P. Nallaiah.*** *Remembered with lots of love and affection by his beloved wife, 9 children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, 13 grandchildren and 9 great grand children – Mrs Mano Ananthanathan (Eldest daughter),*

16 Charterhouse Avenue, Sudbury, Middx HA0 3 DB, Tel: 020 8 795 2532

Australian Newsletter

Across Australia, hundreds of schemes ranging from programmes for young offenders and victims of abuse to educational and vocational training are endeavouring to improve the livelihood of indigenous people. Yet, they are the most disadvantaged group in Australia. Indigenous men die - on average – twenty years younger than their white counterparts and suffer disproportionately high rates of ill health, imprisonment and unemployment. Abuses of alcohol and drugs have made many indigenous households extremely volatile. A recent study found indigenous women were fifty times more likely to endure domestic violence than white Australian women. Successive federal governments have been unsuccessful in delivering better outcomes for indigenous communities, despite winning responsibility for black issues in a historic referendum in 1967. After a fourth consecutive win in last month's elections, the Howard government has plans to rebuild from the ground up with the introduction of behavioural "contracts" with black communities in return for healthcare, education, dole money and services, in an attempt to turn around many years of failure. Accordingly, families and communities will be rewarded for ensuring that their children are washed, clothed and attend school. There are also proposals to use payment cards that can store information and set electronic limits on what indigenous people can buy using government payments.

When a confessed killer received manslaughter verdict recently, it became the talk of the town. A 45-year-old businessman in a suburban Melbourne punched and strangled his wife in the family home in September last year. Now, a jury of seven men and five women found him not guilty of murder. Instead, they handed down a guilty verdict on one count of manslaughter, a charge that could see him free in just a handful of years. After he "squeezed the life" out of his estranged wife, he buried her body on a property in the northeast outskirts of Melbourne. The jury appear to have accepted the provocation defence, which was based almost entirely on claims the accused made to police and was found guilty of manslaughter after the jury heard evidence that his wife provoked him by making very hurtful comments. The accused decided to plead not guilty to murder, despite confessing to the killing and facing a Supreme Court trial and after lengthy legal proceedings, the decision paid off when the verdict was handed down to him.

Sivasupramaniam Sitsabesan

FORTHCOMINGS EVENTS

December 3 *Feast of St. Francis Xavier*
4 *Feast of St. John Damacene*
6 *Karthigai Somavaram (3); Feast of St. Nicholas*
7 *Feast of St. Ambrose*
8 *Krishna Eekathasi; The Immaculate Conception of The Blessed Virgin Mary*
9 *Pirathosam*
11 *Amavasai*
13 *Karthigai Somavaram (4); Feast of St. Lucy*
14 *Sathurthi; Feast of St. John of the Cross*
16 *Shashti; Sri Vinayakar Viratham ends*
18 *Thiruvembavai starts*
21 *Vaikunda Eekathasi; Feast of St. Peter Canisius*
23 *Karthigai; Pirathosam*
25 *Christmas Day*
26 *Full Moon; Feast of St. Stephen*
27 *Aarudra Tharshan; Feast of St. John*
28 *Feast of The Holy Innocents*
30 *Sankadakara Sathurthi*
31 *Feast of St. Sylvester*

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Sri-Lankan Lady Appointed, Head of University in Canada

Dr.Indira Samarasekera nee Arulpragasam has been appointed President (Vice Chancellor) of the prestigious University of Alberta in Canada. At present she is Vice-Pre-sident (Research) in the University of British Colombia in Canada and holds the Chair of Metallurgical Engineering.

Indira a world-renowned engineer and a distinguished researcher in her field has contributed extensively and significantly in metallurgical engineering gaining a string of awards. She is the Officer of the Order of Canada, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Engineering and a Fellow of the Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum. She is also a member of the National Research Council of Canada and serves on the Advisory Board on Minerals and Metals.

She is the first Asian to be appointed to head a University in Canada and coincidently was the first woman to graduate as a Mechanical Engineer from the Peradeniya University in Sri Lanka in 1974. Her earlier education was at Chundikuli and Vembadi in Jaffna and later at Ladies College in Colombo.

Dr. Indira Samarasekera is the daughter of Dr. A.C.Arulpragasam, former ENT Surgeon and Mrs Bali Arulpragasam of Colombo and is the grand niece of the late Prof. Milroy Paul, former Professor of Surgery of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

(MEDICAL HOPE TEAM – UK – OCTOBER 2004 – SRI-LANKA)

HOPE DAWNS IN THE VANNI

"Thank you for coming to our remote village, to meet us and give us comfort through your medicines and the gift of spectacles" said an old lady named Letchumi.

It was dusk, the sun rapidly going down the horizon and the gentle warm wind of the east blowing with thunder clouds gathering overhead, this patient who had trekked three hours to get to our remote Rural Primary Medical Centre, stood erect with her gnarled working hands clasped together in front of her chest, with head slightly bowed, dressed in her best colourful festival outfit, faced marked with deep furrows of better years seen through toil & civil wars. There was something majestic and yet beautifully simple about her manner. I was deeply moved to my inner being, as I realised that she represented the people among whom we had come to serve and listen to what she had just said. This took place at Wadi Vadi, a distant agricultural village in the region of Pooneryn an hour's drive on a broken cart track road from Killinochi, a small yet busy town in Vanni district in the Northern Province of Sri-Lanka. "Your very presence here has indeed made a difference to our lives and given us hope that we have not been forgotten by the outside world" this old lady went on

Like all wars it is the innocent civilians caught up in the middle who face the brunt and hardships of the viciousness of the conflict. It is to this group of disadvantaged and neglected hapless persons that the Hope Medical Team UK sort to bring relief and comfort through care and concern. It is to people like Letchumi who feel despondent and without hope that we desire to bring hope and comfort in practical ways. Letchumi's story is particularly a sad one. Her husband was shot and killed by the forces in the late 80's while tending to his paddy field at mid day and on the 31st day following his death, her two sons who were taking shelter during an air raid were killed. Her sorrow and grief is immense, her tears have known no limits. Sorrow, malnutrition and poverty are etched all over her body. She looked well advanced for her years, for 55years she looked like some one in their early 80's! On several occasions she had been "internally displaced" moving from place to place with her meagre belongings. There were several very similar human stories we came across.

THE TEAM comprised of – 3 doctors – Julian Pedley, Peter Hill & Sam Muthuveloe, 4 in the Vision Team – Nigel Horrocks, Jonathan Pedley, Eileen Weston & Jacqui Watson. This Team worked hard and tirelessly for the fortnight in Sri-Lanka starting at sunrise and concluding with sunset. The demand as always out stripped our resources of personal, time and medicines & spectacles. The camaraderie, cohesiveness and support with in the Team for the task of bringing relief and comfort to the needy despite the challenging ground circumstances were without exception. The choice of venue, publicity, monitoring of patients and organising the local logistical support was in the hands of our hosts who excelled in every aspect. The ordinary people hosted us to the best of hospitality, which was truly lavish and moving. They gave out of their meagre resources in bountiful plenty to a point of embarrassment.

TRAVEL:

The Team undertook a beating pace, criss-crossing & travelling the country of Sri-Lanka in two simple Hiace Toyota vans. The uncarpeted, pot hole impregnated roads, the muddy cart tracks, the bouncy rides all contributed to a mission with a difference. The vehicles took a battering as did the bodies of the pale-faced occupants, who had given up choosing the side of the vehicle that had any suspension left. The Sri-Lankan motorists are a breed apart, who have their own interesting high way code and road courtesies. Vehicles may have faulty brakes but they sure do have art horns fitted. Tooting the horn is a national past time, with secret messages passed between drivers which could range from

conveying "thanks", to "beware I am coming at you!" or "Watch out! The local cops are behind the tree with their speed camera!" Often we thought the person at the wheel used the horn to feel their way round the hairpin bends on the mountain ranges like a partially sighted person using a white stick!

KILLINOCHI – VANNI:

The Vanni is jungle terrain, mainly dry and flat with limited rainfall. Interesting wild life did roam freely in these jungles at one time. The Chola imperial kings of South India in centuries gone by; imported wild elephants for combat battle purposes from these regions. Paddy cultivation, cash crops of chillies and vegetables were produced here. The coastline and fresh water lagoons gave up its exotic fish and prawns that graced the tourist's dining tables. All this changed with the 20-year civil war that saw some of the most vicious guerrilla fighting ever seen in Asia. The once fertile and vibrant area is now with out its basic infrastructure of electricity, water service, functioning schools, hospitals or factories of employment.

CENTRE FOR HEALTH CARE:

We were invited by the CHC an umbrella organisation that is registered under the government of Sri-Lanka with its main headquarters in Killinochi. CHC seeks to improve the health care of the population at large in the North and East through various worthwhile programmes and projects while coordinating the work of the NGO's, foreign individuals and liasing closely with the Department of Health. We were invited to work from the Rural Primary Medical Centres of Thilleepan, and ran our Clinics at Iyankankulam, Wadi Vadi, Pooneryn, Puliyankulam and Mankulam in the Vanni District. The health care staff running these centres were mature, able and resourceful people. They were deeply committed to the local population and had undertaken a series of health awareness programmes engaging the population at large and co-working with the children at schools. We were impressed to learn that the Vanni district that led the tables for mortality figures from malaria in 1997 now has shown zero figures for the last four years alongside a sharp decline of morbidity figures following effective public participant vector control measures of the mosquito.

There was a sense of deep desire and dedication amongst the people of the region to improve their lot and to acquire knowledge and skills. One could see agriculture picking up, the impressive reforestation programme and small industries sprouting. If given the opportunities and facilities growth in this area seems assured.

The Team assessed the vision of about 1200 persons and gave away about 1500 spectacles in all. About 2500 persons were seen for their medical concerns, examined and treated carefully. Health promotions and disease prevention was emphasised. We gave away important and practical medical equipment, and books as well as medicines. There is much more to be done.

THE NEED:

There is a need for small teams of professionals to visit on a regular basis to encourage and enhance the Rural Primary Care Centres. The health care personnel who work at these Centres need a professional development plan specific and sensitive to their local requirements. This would require an ongoing rolling teaching programme. There exists an urgent need for professional counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists to respond to the deep emotional trauma and fall out from the bitter 20 years of Civil War that gripped the helpless population that was trapped and displaced on multiple occasions. Hands on practical clinicians such as teams of Primary Care Physicians, Dermatologists, Dentists, Dental Hygienists, Ophthalmologists, Opticians, Otolaryngologists, Audiologists and Physiotherapists would all find themselves immensely useful

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED:

On my return to the UK, I have been often asked the question "Was the mission a success?" I have struggled to give a coherent answer, as different people understand the word success in different ways. Like beauty being in the eye of the beholder so it is true of success. We were invited by our hosts to bring professionals to treat the needy and to train and equip the local health care workers in their ongoing work, which we did to the satisfaction of our hosts. We have now been invited by our hosts to bring more teams at more frequent intervals to encourage the local medical services and to assist in the reconstruction of the fabric of the fractured community. All members of the October Team have volunteered to return to Sri-Lanka to continue the work of the Hope Medical Team working alongside the nationals to bring hope and comfort to the needy. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that the mission was accomplished.

"Soli deo gloria."

Dr Sam Muthuveloe
For and on behalf of
- Hope Medical Team UK. Oct 2004
21 Lower Stonehayes, Gt. Linford,
Milton Keynes MK14 5ES

(continued from page 35)

tlement, about federalism for fifty years. We can go on talking. But the urgent humanitarian needs of our people have to be addressed soon. Once the talks begin they can bring their ideas to the negotiating table. Hence we had a long discussion with the Norwegians about how to restart the talks early", Mr. Balasingham said.

Muslim youth shot dead: Nov 11 – According to the police in eastern Batticaloa, a Muslim youth at Katuvanwila in the Welikanda police area had been shot dead on 8 November allegedly by LTTE gunmen. Police identified the victim as 25-year-old A. M. Thajudeen, who they said was believed to have been in touch with Karuna loyalists operating in the area. The Tigers were targeting Muslim youth who they suspect have connections with the dissident LTTE Karuna group as part of their strategy to neutralise the dissidents. The security forces have informed the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission about the incident.

Jailed for 39 years: Nov 12 - A South Africa national named Neville Saumyamoorthy, alias Ganeshmoorthy, who pleaded guilty to possessing nine Sri Lankan passports and 'schengen' visas, which allow travel in nine European countries, was sentenced to 39 years rigorous imprisonment and fined one million rupee in a land mark judgement by the Colombo Fort Magistrate Kusala Sarojini Abeywardane.

The South African had advertised his services providing job opportunities abroad on the internet and a 20 year old Sri Lankan youth had made contact with him. Later the foreigner who visited Sri Lanka had made arrangements to meet the boy at the Crescat in Colombo-3. A police party of sleuths led by Chief Inspector Shani Abeysekara arrested the South African at their rendezvous with the passports and the visas. He was arrested by the CID sleuths on July 25, 2002 and has been in remand since then.

Body found in Mannar town: Nov 13 - The body of a man with gun shot wounds in the head was found in Mannar town on 13 November, Saturday morning, Police said. A placard with the name Ellalan Padai (army) was found by the body. When Mannar acting magistrate visited the scene of murder, the dead man's brother identified the body as that of Mr.Thommai Yesudasan, 38, of Nochchikulam north of Mannar. ❑

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